



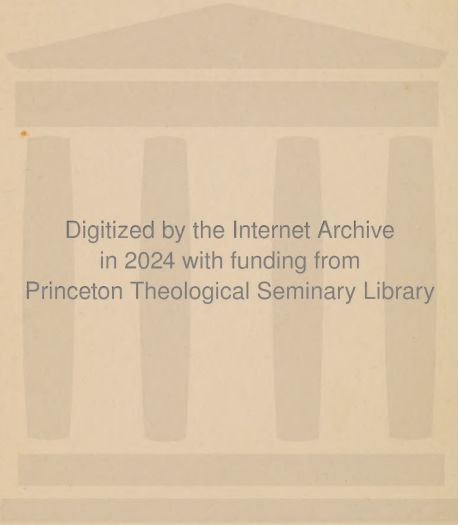
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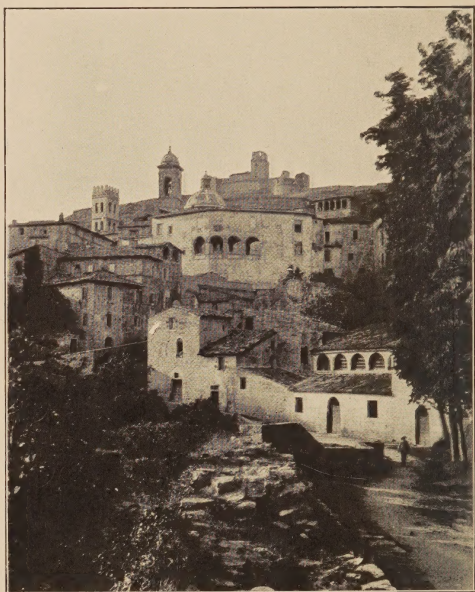


HOMES OF THE FIRST FRANCISCANS  
IN UMBRIA, THE BORDERS OF TUSCANY  
AND THE NORTHERN MARCHES



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VIEW OF ASSISI from the ANCIENT  
CITY WALL BELOW S. CHIARA

HOMES  
OF THE  
FIRST FRANCISCANS

IN UMBRIA, THE BORDERS OF TUSCANY  
AND THE NORTHERN MARCHES

BY  
BERYL D. DE SELINCOURT



WITH 13 ILLUSTRATIONS  
FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

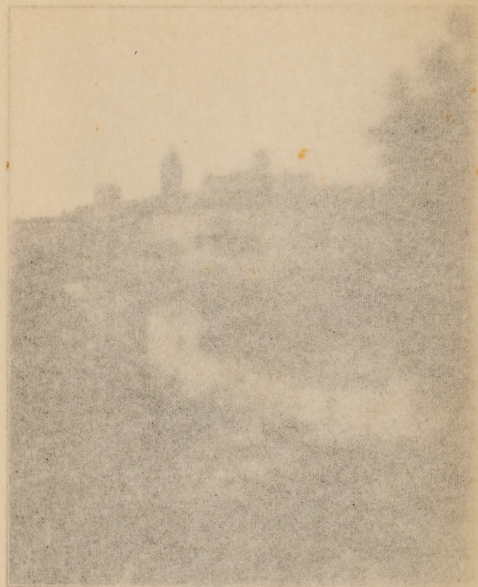
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TO  
MY FRIEND  
M. G. STURGE HENDERSON





## PREFACE

BY

PAUL SABATIER

NO one can hope to know S. Francis without knowing and loving the places where he lived. And here it is not a question of geographical, external knowledge, but of something more intimate and more vital. Without knowing anything about Greece, one may understand Plato ; but it is not possible to understand S. Francis without knowing Umbria. A knowledge of the places where events occurred is indispensable to political history, but here it is quite another matter. It is not only because the eyes of S. Francis rested, glowing with hope or burning with pain, on these hills which the setting sun leaves so reluctantly, that we want to see them and feel their spirit. It is because, as we look on them in the light of his temperament, a faculty far transcending our intellect comes to birth within us—a beginning of harmony, then communion ; and if we could follow it to the end, there would spring up in us a sincere desire of fellow-service.



## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

THIS book was undertaken at the suggestion of M. Paul Sabatier, to whom I am greatly indebted for the generous loan of his library and unpublished notes, and for much valuable advice ; also for kindly supplying me with a Preface. The completion of the book was due to the generous co-operation of Mildred Bicknell, whose management was responsible for the success of the journey, and whose photographs supplied the illustrations. I am glad of this opportunity publicly to acknowledge my debt to the Professor Milziade Santoni, Canon of Camerino, to the Guardian of Matelica, and Signor Camillo Pace, of Monte Giorgio, for the gift of their own books relating to the subject ; to the Brothers of La Verna, Monte Casale, and Lo Speco ; and to others who materially assisted me by their unfailing courtesy and hospitality, many of them obscure and simple persons whose names are unknown to me.



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# HOMES

OF THE

## FIRST FRANCISCANS

“Et adducentes eam in quodam colle, ostenderunt ei totum orbem quem respicere poterat, dicentes : Hoc est claustrum nostrum, domina” (*Sacrum Commercium*, chap. xxii.).

“How can I extend your kingdom, O Mazda?  
By tending your poor in their suffering.”

ONE of the main obstacles to a vital and intimate appreciation of the value of a man's work is the difficulty of distinguishing what it contains of universal value from the temporal limitations which determine its form. It is necessary to recreate the conditions under which he worked, the climatic and social atmosphere which surrounded him, and the influences which bore upon him; and in proportion to our distance from him in time and geographical conditions is the difficulty of our task.

Not the least valuable part, therefore, of M. Renan's *Vie de Jésus* is that devoted to topographical description. For though one main element in Christ's claim to uniqueness is the

extraordinary aloofness of his character from temporal and transitory impressions and relations, though there is no teacher whose universality is more readily recognisable, much of his teaching was necessarily clothed in a form inaccessible to us but for an interpreter.

Considerably nearer, both in time and geographical position, but infinitely more modified by both, stands the figure of S. Francis of Assisi ; still far enough away to make what is of wider significance in his transparently pure and beautiful life, difficult to distinguish from the exuberance of an original and overflowing individuality, or the peculiarities of local habit.

S. Francis did not display his originality in the foundation of any strikingly new system of life ; he turned it into the channel of interpretation. He seized on certain aspects of the teaching of Jesus which he thought most suited to the needs of those of his time and land on whom the light of day seemed to shine most dimly, and with incomparable energy and directness he proceeded to vitalise those aspects by translating them into living terms of daily action.

S. Francis became a leader even through the whole-hearted devotion with which he chose to be a follower. His service of men was so radiant with love that it burns through the exaggerated and

sometimes obscuring forms in which his belief found expression, and lives with a freshness which no sober criticism of latter-day reasoning can dispel.

We cannot too emphatically urge that Francis was no protester. The negative element of iconoclasm is entirely absent from his character. We search in vain in him for any breath of hostile criticism in his relations with the world or with the Church. In fact, it is his attitude towards these two great forces—the “saeculari” and the “religiosi”—that distinguishes him so sharply from the ascetic or the Protestant reformer, both of whom he resembles in their positive aspects. In a sense, it is even true to say that Francis never left the world. It held for him all that was humanly beautiful in intellect and physical achievement, and all that was naturally beautiful. He moved constantly in it with interchange of gifts, while concentrating his energies in one direction and deliberately leaving aside what he felt incompatible with his work.

It is an error to think of the glories of art or of science as essentially opposed to the Franciscan spirit; they are so conditionally only, in anticipation of a more equitable adjustment of society.

But it is in Francis' relations with the Church that his originality chiefly shows itself. He did not attempt reforms within it; he accepted all

spiritual privileges it had to offer, even with their attendant abuses (cf. his attitude towards Indulgences). But while fully realising and rejoicing in his dependence on the Church, he realised no less fully his independence. He proposed, in fact, to play the part of the Church's light-infantry—to stand in the same relation to it with his small company as Roland and his paladins to the great empire they represented. Unencumbered by impedimenta, without the elaborate machinery of a great organisation, he would go into places inaccessible to the Church as an ecclesiastical body. He did not see that the Church from her very constitution could not recognise his supplementary position, unless his dependence greatly exceeded his independence; for the existence of this little company outside her control and without papal authorisation was a covert criticism on her own shortcomings, an implied discovery that the cornerstone of the building had been allowed somewhat to moulder away. The need he supplied was the Church's condemnation.

The idea that Francis in the foundation of an Order had in view to supplant the monastic orders or to point the way in which all men should walk, is an entire misconception of his aim. It is true that he resisted all attempts to absorb his Order into those already existing, for he realised that such



an identification would involve the sacrifice of his entire purpose. Nothing could be more emphatic than the refusal with which he met the suggestion that he should adopt the rule of S. Benedict, S. Augustine, or S. Bernard.<sup>1</sup> Leading Ugolino, the brothers' emissary, silently into the assembly at the famous Chapter of Mats, in fervent and eloquent words he declared his intention of remaining faithful to the direct call of God to him and to the form in which it had come. His passionate reply was of the nature of a manifesto.

Francis never sought for followers; indeed, like Christ, he bade various candidates count the costs. The Order grew up independently of his determination, and it is true to say that it passed beyond his control. We are inclined to lament the lack of elasticity, the apparent absence of any germ of development in his idea. But it is a mistake to think that Francis did not realise its limitations; in one sense they were the justification of its existence. Life compels us to recognise that achievement is the child of limitation, that power and serviceableness depend as much on exclusion as on inclusion. We are forced to gauge our powers and adapt our life to their limit. Thus Francis required that his followers should be specialists. He never demanded the

<sup>1</sup> *Speculum Perfectionis*, 68.

renunciation of possessions nor of life's wider interests save from the few who elected to do the particular work that he was doing, and in a modified form the standard he set up for these is permanently applicable, or so long at least as a class exists which it was his life's work to elevate and console.

There is nothing uniquely distinctive in Francis' deliberate choice of absolute poverty as a means of meeting the distress he had set his mind to alleviate : what is unique is the inspiration infused into the idea by his individuality. He had so pictorial and poetic a mind that he could not conceive of methods and means as such, he must visualise and embody his method in personal form till it became a living reality and worshipful in itself. The framing of a rule, or rather the demand for it, was in reality the death-blow of the Order as Francis had conceived it, and he instinctively felt it to be so ; for his brotherhood had no other basis of existence than the elective service of love : when this had left it and its members were half-reluctantly bound to observe what had once inspired them with joyful devotion, no organised reform could restore its soul.

At the present time, when many are considering the possibility of applying the principles which underlie the work of S. Francis, and even some

of his methods, to the social needs of to-day, it is, perhaps, particularly necessary to see him in relation to his time and country, to set the portrait of him which has come down to us still further in relief, by filling in some details of the background yet unfamiliar.

Far more even than the historical atmosphere, we must attempt to reproduce the natural conditions in which his life was set ; for his debt to nature was no less great than that of the poet-king David, and we cannot enter into the spirit of the man, or appreciate the full significance of his inspiring life, as it has been portrayed in the authentic biographies, or reflected with curious distortions in the less trustworthy records, unless we recognise to what a great degree his being was bound up in the life of Nature, and how much of his strength was wrought out of his contact with her.

And in this case imagination is not our only scene-painter. We are not, as in so many portraits of the remote past, compelled to build up our background from a few fragmentary written indications, impossible to verify. Material is abundant if we will seek it out ; for the intervening centuries have dealt kindly with the Franciscan haunts ; their remoteness has, in most cases, preserved them from modification by new industrial conditions. We may still penetrate into the heart of the past in the

natural solitudes elected by Francis and his followers for habitation, and by faithfully recording their aspect may perhaps recapture the nature of their appeal to him.

To S. Francis the natural creation did not groan and travail. Love seemed to him to work there unfettered and unobstructed by conflicting personal claims, and no cloud of sin was allowed to mar the serenity of his pantheistic vision. Nature was to him instinct with life and with the joy of an ever-present divinity. His poet-mind saw no division between animate and inanimate in Nature, but endowed the unconscious elements of the great harmony with a living soul, to join in the universal service and act of worship. His attribution of conscious life to what we are accustomed to call inanimate nature was no doubt in practice developed to excess, but it was an expression of his truly poetic realisation of the great principle of love which binds together all members of the vast universe, the spirit of the air and the gnome of the cave, man and the clod of clay, in the great brotherhood of life. The legends which attribute to Francis the powers of an Orpheus not idly symbolise the intimacy of his relation to the natural world and the power of appeal which lies in a penetrating insight and love.

For it was through love that Francis attained his

harmony, to love that he attuned his great canticle. It was in the power of an alert and penetrating sympathy that he achieved that communion with nature which is reflected in the legends setting him before us as the Melampus of the Middle Ages. Francis, who renounced the world (*saeculum*), made a wider world his own through love.

“So passed he luminous-eyed for earth and the fates  
We arm to bruise or caress us ; his ears were charged  
With tones of love in a whirl of voluble hates,  
With music wrought of distraction his heart enlarged.  
Celestial shining, though mortal—singer, though mute,  
He drew the master of harmonies, voiced or still,  
To seek him ; heard at the silent medicine-root  
A song—beheld in fulfilment the unfulfilled.”

Thus we cannot always afford to neglect the legends of miracle which soon began to spring up round the Poverello. They do not, on the whole, do violence to our sympathy or imagination ; they are, for the most part, an extended application of the principle of illuminating and vivifying love which Francis recognised as his sole guide in action, and they become intelligible in the light of the sober authentic narrative of his life, when located among the scenes which are supposed to have inspired them. For example, however extravagant some of the narratives of the *Fioretti* may seem, they had their birth among these very scenes ; they

spring from the heart and mind of the people, and therefore have a claim on our attention ; for they help to bring us into relation with the spirit of the time most fully reflected by the life of the Lesser Brothers.

It is, then, in relation to the natural environment, which so largely modified the current of his life, that we shall best understand the personality of S. Francis. Nothing is more striking in the early records of the Franciscan community than the specification of the scenes in which some of the most vital of their spiritual experiences took place. It was in meditation amid natural scenery—among the most beautiful of Italy—that they fought out their spiritual battles and won the assurance of peace.

And the retreats most intimately connected with them still bear the stamp of their humanising emotion, for these wooers of poverty lived intensely, grotesque as may seem to us some of the expressions in which their energy found vent. The religious belief of their time distrusted reason as a fashioning agent in man's being : thus the passion to which these brothers denied sensual satisfaction found expression in uncontrolled irregularities of action. But the constitution of the Franciscan community demanded that these passions should not spend themselves in mere indulgence of un-

fruitful energy. It was wisely directed by the founder into channels of practical efficacy. He did not countenance contemplation as an end in itself, but as a means to the attainment of strength necessary for sustaining the work which membership of his Order implied. The solitudes were the tiring-room of their spirit for the peopled places, and it is with the solitudes so intimately connected with the life of the Order, with the humble lodges always slightly sequestered from the city walls, that we must familiarise ourselves if we would understand what manner of men they were who, with such joyful inspiration, vivified and quickened the common things of life and the common men who took part in them.

The *Speculum* and the *Legend* of the Three Companions are chiefly the work of a man who lived in the closest companionship and intercourse of mind with S. Francis. Leo's understanding of his friend and master seems to have been of that subtle and imaginative kind which seldom demands explanations, and he must remain our directest guide to the character and ideals of S. Francis. Moreover, his intimate knowledge of the scenes which formed the centre of activity for the Franciscan Order, and his specification of local detail, render his topographical descriptions incalculably precious.

With the later inventions of a pedantic and unvital orthodoxy I shall not at all concern myself. They bear the same relation to the early biographies and popular records as the Apocryphal Lives of Christ and the Virgin to the Synoptic Gospels.



## ASSISI

THERE are places, as there are people, which possess a potency of appeal altogether independent of the beauty which is apparent. It is not custom which initially binds us to them; the attraction I would define is a sudden kindling of blood and spirit other than the slow, steady growth of a practised love. The initiatory stages of intimacy are superseded, and we are drawn into the heart of their life by an irresistible power.

Assisi possesses in a pre-eminent degree this power of attraction, a power which is realised no doubt in her own inherent beauty and in her artistic treasures, but which transcends these, and moves men to seek her again by an almost human spell of personality.

The city is built on the most northerly and lowest spur of Monte Subasio, yet still high above the great Umbrian plain which spreads before it on either hand, south, down the long valley to Spoleto, and north-west to Perugia, its horizon bounded on every side by soft mountain outlines. It is harmonious in structure; its buildings of warm-

hued native stone climb in curving lines round the hill from the boundary of the now ruined city walls. The two Franciscan temples of S. Francesco and S. Chiara mark the limits of its length, and the ruins of its once proud castle crown the summit, reared high above the level of the town.

No better place than the castle can be chosen for a survey not only of the city of Assisi, but of its whole surrounding territory, within which lie the places bound by association with the memory of S. Francis. Sasso Rosso juts out a dark mass against the outline of Monte Subasio, several miles to the south. Nearer to the city can be seen the fringes of the woody cleft in which the Carceri are buried, and between these two points, midway up the mountain side, the humble grey ruins of S. Benedetto are conspicuous in a patch of bright green meadow.

Only just without the southern boundary of the city, S. Damiano lies far down the hillside, half-buried among trees ; and conspicuous in the centre of the plain to the north, among the vineyards, stands the great domed church of S. Maria degli Angeli, within which the Portiuncula lies buried. Close beside it to the left, scarcely distinguishable among the other scattered cottages, is the little hut of Rivo Torto.

The plain is now so bare and open that it is hard

to picture the middle stage in its history, which Francis knew, when the city looked out over a great forest : we seem nearer to the earlier time of which Propertius sings, when "the waters of the Umbrian lake grew warm the summer through."<sup>1</sup>

From the castle-keep, the city of S. Francis' day and the later portions which have gathered round the two Franciscan sanctuaries, are seen as one. The whole city lies towards the sun's course from south-east to north-west ; on the precipitous barren hillside which forms the eastern bulwark of the castle, the Campo Santo is the sole building.

Along the narrow "vicoli," just below the castle-keep, will be found most of the little chapels either known to S. Francis or belonging to the many confraternities which came into being soon after his death. One of these, the now disused chapel of S. Lorenzo, lies on the southern slope of the castle hill, on the borders of the grassy keep.

Further to the left, the south-east boundary of the town is marked by the Rocchiciuola, or little Rocca, a single solitary tower of which remains, close upon the ruined city wall, overlooking the barren eastern slope of Subasio, round which the road winds to Nocera. At the south-east limit lies the Roman region, the amphitheatre, half-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Miss Duff Gordon's *Story of Assisi*, chap. i.

hidden among houses, and the grass-grown Piazza Nuova which was once the Naumachia. A roughly paved way leads from this Roman quarter to the quiet piazza of S. Rufino, which the castle immediately overlooks, and parallel with this, on a lower level reached by steep streets or steps, rises the great church and graceful campanile of S. Chiara, which, with its convent, lies just within the ancient western wall. It encloses the chapel of S. Giorgio<sup>1</sup> where S. Francis learned to read and write and preached his first sermon; there too his body lay awaiting permanent burial. To the right of S. Chiara, on the same level, but separated from it by an inward curve of the hillside, is the former cathedral church of S. Maria Maggiore, built upon the ruins of the ancient temple of Janus,<sup>2</sup> and close beside it the bishop's palace, where S. Francis lay before he was carried to the Portiuncula to die.

S. Maria Maggiore and the Rocca, or castle, mark the greatest breadth of the city, and midway between them—the point in which all its main

<sup>1</sup> The chapel of S. Giorgio, a square, vaulted room, may still be seen within the church of S. Chiara, decorated with frescoes of the Umbrian school. The crucifix which talked with S. Francis is preserved here. The face of Christ has a certain beauty, and the figure is without any distortion of feature or form. Tall figures stand to right and left of it.

<sup>2</sup> The Porta Moiano, close beside S. Maria Maggiore, is supposed to derive its name from this source.

streets converge—lies the great piazza and general market-place, shadowed by the temple of Minerva and the chief municipal buildings. It was here, only a few steps removed from his father's house, that Francis would have to undergo his chief ordeal of persecution.

Away to the right the city, as he knew it, soon came to an end, but long streets of deserted palaces now lead it on to its true centre, S. Francesco, still slightly apart from its north-west boundary, jutting out towards Perugia. West of it, outside the old gate of S. Francesco, the broad road to the Portiuncula descends the hillside in serpentine coils and curves; far down the hillside, at the western extremity of the city, lies the noble, ancient church of S. Pietro.

From a point of vantage just below the castle keep, I watched night fall on the city after a day of storm and thunder. All day long the weight of cloud and black vapour had hung with strange oppression over the plain and obscured the mountains. Towards evening bright gleams began to pass over the wooded hollows of the lower hills, and suddenly the light burst in swift succession on the six ranges of hills which rise in beautiful outline to the left of Perugia, the lowest a mere ridge above the plain. Then the great pall lifted, and the world began to wake in freshness of release

from its entombment. The Tescio, rich from the recent rains, wound coils of broad silver in the low sunrays. The foreground plain was veiled in brightness, while down the long valley to Spoleto it faded into dusky ocean mists, the scattered dwellings, some rosy, some snowy in the brightness, strewn abroad on it like jewels. Spello, Trevi, and far away, Spoleto, seemed to pour a stream of silver down the mountain slope. The west was flooded with warm, soft orange, while above the eastern horizon the great storm clouds still hung in gloomy array, touched under with fiery bronze, which spread upon the mountain top a brooding wing of purple. And after this day of storm, in the evening peace, the monotonous chant of mourners came along the street towards the disappearing sun, a short procession of the poor, with no chief mourner, muttering their Ave Maria della Sera. Long after the lower town to the right of the central piazza lay in dusky shadow and the glow had faded into the pale afterlight, the upper towers still shone in pallid brightness, as if reflecting some unseen radiance. On this night the centuries seemed bridged as never by day, and when the stillness was broken by the distant sound of soft dance music from some house of revelry, it was easy to picture Francis starting through the silent streets alone, and to hear the dancers bursting

out into the night to seek their leader and demand a reason for his strange withdrawal.

When Francis, son of Bernardone, was born to Assisi in 1182, the city was already old in centuries and in traditions. Her origins were veiled in legend, and discerned only by conjecture, but the successive ages of her growth were stamped in enduring memorials of Pagan and Christian inspiration. The noble Roman temple of Minerva, the grand façade and campanile of the cathedral of S. Rufino, the church of S. Pietro, were among many stately landmarks in the city: noble civic buildings and palaces lined the long paved streets and the piazzas; and above the whole, the castle, still intact, towered from its precipitous, rocky keep.

But it remained for the genius of S. Francis to quicken and renew her forces, and to win for her a religious and artistic heritage which has in part obscured her former treasures.

It is as guardian of some of the first-fruits of the great artistic Renaissance that Assisi is now rightly the goal of pilgrimage; it is these artistic records which to most men will vindicate her claim to guardianship of the Franciscan tradition.

The splendid fabric of S. Francesco on the Collis Paradisi was a strangely ironical tribute to the

humblest of saints, and the first great conquest of brother Elias; for it was in this very hill, the burial-place of malefactors, and hence known as the *Collis Inferni*, that tradition says Francis had elected to be buried.<sup>1</sup> Thus Elias, by a master-stroke of policy, contrived both to fulfil and nullify his master's desire for self-abasement and lowly poverty: it was not with the bared weapon of an avowed enemy that he perverted the Franciscan tradition, but with the subtle poison of a seeming friend. From the point of view of that tradition we can neither applaud his methods nor his achievement; but in the perspective of time we may appreciate the value of his gift to succeeding generations; for we owe to him the initiation of that grand and most fruitful union between S. Francis and religious art, which culminated in the *Allegories of Giotto*. The church of S. Francesco is a priceless document of artistic worth; but despite the noble achievements of Giotto, the Franciscan sentiment which later ages have found there is the emotional outcome of the devotion of generations, an entirely different sentiment from that which haunts the chosen retreats and natural sanctuaries of S. Francis and his companions.

<sup>1</sup> No doubt in recollection of the prophecy of Isaiah liii., "And he made his grave with the wicked," desirous even in the grave to conform his lot to that of his master Jesus.



The speedy glorification and idealisation of S. Francesco as the monument in which his spirit would most love to dwell, is but another example of the tragic disparity in the aims of master and disciple, fitly symbolised perhaps by S. Peter's sword, a disparity which dooms the great soul to loneliness even amongst the most passionate of his followers.

But S. Francis had at least a few friends with whom it was possible for him to hold intimate communion. We have on record the attitude which two of them—one of whom was with S. Francis during his hours of deepest anguish—adopted towards the church with which the princely genius of brother Elias proposed to glorify the memory of their friend and master.

It is worth while to dwell on the opposition of the party at the Portiuncula to the erection of the basilica, for there is no injunction of S. Francis' which bears more closely on our subject than that respecting the nature of the dwellings in which alone the Brothers were to shelter, no part of the rule on which he insists with such nervous and almost prophetic emphasis as that which limits the development of the Order in this particular, as if he foresaw in what direction his decrees would be first evaded.

Superstition, which required of a saint that he

should foretell the form as surely as he foreknew the spirit of events,<sup>1</sup> endowed S. Francis after his death with powers of miraculous and distinct prevision, reproducing in grosser form his intuition of coming disaster.

It is in the *Vita S. Ægidii* that we find the record of those early days of sore internal conflict which began to sap the life of the Order before S. Francis had been carried to his last burial-place.

“Therefore this brother Elias, after the death of S. Francis, began to build a church of immense strength and magnitude without the walls, on a precipitous height which had before been called the *Collis Inferni* (hill of Hell); but when the lord Pope Gregory IX. had laid the first stone in the foundations of the church, it was called the *Collis Paradisi*. Now, for the building of that church brother Elias began to exact money in various ways; he put a marble shell outside the building, in which those who came might put money. Seeing which, the companions of blessed Francis, especially brother Leo, came to brother Giles at Perugia asking for advice. And he replied: ‘Even though the building should stretch to Assisi,<sup>2</sup> one corner suffices me to dwell in.’

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry*.

<sup>2</sup> This supposition was more extravagant then than now, when the last houses of the city are divided only by a short space of

“And when the brothers asked of him whether they should break that shell, he turned to brother Leo, and said with tears in his eyes : ‘If you are a dead man, go and break it, but if you are alive, leave it alone, for you will have to bear heavy persecution from that man brother Elias.’

“And when brother Leo heard this, he and his companions broke in pieces the porphyry shell.

ground from the convent. M. Sabatier, after a careful study of its site and the evidence of early prints, is of opinion that in the thirteenth century, not only was the city far less extensive in this direction, but that the Collis Paradisi was completely isolated from it by a ravine, the Upper and Lower Churches being united to the city by two separate drawbridges. “Peu à peu,” he says, “des rues entières ont été bâties, en particulier la rue qui en dépit des nouvelles appellations officielles, ne cesse pas de rester pour tout bon assisiat la Via Superba. La tendance qui attirait la ville vers le couvent, attirait le couvent vers la ville. Peu à peu aussi, les précautions du Moyen Age, qui avaient fait de ce couvent une sorte de forteresse, sont devenues inutiles, l'accès a été rendu plus facile, de siècle en siècle les précipices qui l'isolaient ont été comblés jusqu' à ce qu'au XVIII. siècle un dernier terre-plein soit venu rendre inutile le pont-levis de l'église supérieure. Tout cela a été si graduel que plus d'un architecte en étudiant cette gigantesque construction ne s'est pas aperçu de cette transformation qui a changé si désavantageusement son aspect extérieur. Pour en avoir quelque idée il faut descendre dans le lit du Tescio et descendre ce torrent depuis les ruines du monastère de S. Donato jusqu' au Ponte S. Vittorino. Du coté du Nord, la basilique est en partie restée dégagée. On peut par la pensée supprimer les additions à la construction primitive et se l'imaginer a peu près telle que la vit frère Elie, le jour où pour la dernière fois son regard restait sur elle.”

And brother Elias, enraged by this, had them thoroughly beaten by his servants and expelled from Assisi, and on this account a great uproar arose among the brothers."

But the opposition of a small minority could prevail nothing against the papal and popular enthusiasm which brother Elias had enlisted in his enterprise. Three years after the death of S. Francis, the Lower Church was ready to receive his body, and the convent was fit for habitation by the Brothers.

With the history of the great church we are not here concerned, save in relation to those followers who were called on to witness this first great rent in the garment of the Lesser Brothers.

Before, therefore, we pass to consider the places of Francis' choice, which preserved in Assisi his true traditions, it will be interesting to note the attitude of brother Juniper, one of the most faithful yet most whimsical of Francis' first followers, towards the new and lordly institution, which seemed likely to supplant the Portiuncula.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti: Vita di Frate Ginepro V.* Though S. Francesco is not mentioned by name, there can be no doubt as to the place of the incident. The term "convent of Assisi" is never used of the Portiuncula, and the splendour of the altar-trappings and various suggestions of locality all point to S. Francesco as the scene of Juniper's freak.

Juniper's open criticism of it is not recorded ; his condemnation lay in carrying into the more ceremonious standards of the Assisi convent a breath of the life at the Portiuncula, which perhaps served as a more effectual reminder than Leo's open revolt.

The full force of the story will be missed unless it be remembered that Elias had lived at S. Francesco with his own chef and large retinue of attendants, and had very considerably raised the standard in matters of diet and ménage.

Juniper, who was spending a Christmas at Assisi, was one day asked by the sacristan to take charge of the church while he went to dine, and as he stood praying, a poor woman came to ask for alms. Juniper, who might plead as a precedent Francis' action on a similar occasion, set his mind to discover whether he could supply her need from the church, saying, "Wait a minute, and I will see if I can find something to give you from this elaborate altar." Now at this altar there was a very lordly, much decorated fringe, with silver bells of great value. Says brother Juniper : "These bells are superfluous," and he took a knife and cut them all away from the fringe and gave them to the poor woman. Meanwhile the sacristan, remembering Juniper's unaccountable zeal for charity, began to doubt his wisdom in leaving him in charge, and

hurried back before he had finished his dinner to see that all was well. Juniper, who, as usual, expected sympathy with his deeds of love,<sup>1</sup> was amazed at the sacristan's outburst of anger, and attempted to demonstrate the reasonableness of his action, but without success. The sacristan searched in vain for the woman, and at last carried off the fringe to the General, who was in the city, and begged that compensation might be demanded from Juniper for the destruction of the most handsome fringe in the sacristy. The General replied : " It is not brother Juniper who has done this, but rather your own folly ; for by this time you ought to have known his ways, and I can tell you that I am surprised he did not give away the whole frontal ; but still I will chastise him well for this misdeed." All the brothers were summoned, and Juniper was called in, and so severely did the General reprimand him that he grew quite hoarse from raising his voice. " Brother Juniper," says the chronicler, " cared little or nothing for his words, for he delighted in insults and to be thoroughly abused, but he began to meditate on some remedy for the General's hoarseness. . . . Brother Juniper went into the city and ordered a

<sup>1</sup> Cf. his attitude towards the owners of the pigs, one of whom he had mutilated to supply the passing desire of a sick brother at the Portiuncula. *Vita di Frate Ginepro I.*

good bowl of flour and butter to be prepared, and when a good part of the night had passed he went for it, and returned, and lighting a candle took this bowl of flour to the General's cell, and knocked. The General opened the door, and seeing him there with a candle alight and a bowl in his hand, he asked in a low voice: 'Who is it?' Brother Juniper replied: 'My father, to-day when you were reproving me for my faults I noticed that your voice was getting hoarse; I think it must have been through too much fatigue, and so I meditated on a remedy, and had this porridge made for you. I beg you to eat it, for I assure you it will relieve your chest and your throat.' The General said: 'What do you mean by coming to disturb people at this hour?' Brother Juniper replied: 'See, I have made it for you; I pray you to eat without further excuse, for it will do you a great deal of good.'"

But the General was not to be pacified. Thoroughly annoyed at the trick played on him, he burst out into insults against his troublesome visitor. Juniper, quite unperturbed, made answer: "My father, if you really will not eat, even though this porridge was made specially for you, you might at least do me this favour, to hold the candle for me, and I will eat it."

This last sign of "simplicity" seems to have

overcome the General, who replied: "Well, since you insist on it, you and I will eat together." So they sat down and ate the porridge, and, the chronicler adds, "were much more refreshed by devotion than by the food."

SAN DAMIANO.—Scarcely a quarter of a mile from the Porta Nuova, the most southerly gate of the city, a steep rough road, leading directly down the mountain slope from the city, brings us to the gates of S. Damiano. The little convent nestles low beneath the level of the city, though still seeming to form part of it, continuing with its wooded garden the graceful outline of the city wall, and sufficiently raised above the plain to have a wide though broken view across it to the mountains. Through a small square courtyard we pass into the ancient church, restored by S. Francis, the door of which is now sheltered by a portico, connecting the convent on the left with an open chapel to the right of the original little church. A deep-set circular window lights the west end of the church, and above this is another window, shaded with a tiny porch, but now blocked up, from which S. Clare is supposed to have repulsed a pillaging band of Saracens belonging to the army of Frederick II. It was not the first time that she had faced armed men without wavering, and had





S. DAMIANO  
(FROM THE VIA FRANCESCA)



quelled them. On this occasion they seem to have been struck with superstitious fear by the apparition bearing the Sacrament, and to have fled in confusion even from the ladder they had already set against the wall.

The little church remains unchanged in form since S. Francis' time, save for the addition of a small chapel, forming a minute south transept. It was added in the seventeenth century, and contains a wooden crucifix carved by Innocenzio di Palermo, whom tradition has robbed of his meed of praise by ascribing the face, which is of considerable beauty, to angelic workmanship.

The little chapel consisted originally of a single aisle, like all the wayside chapels of Umbria. It was evidently once decorated with frescoes, but all are effaced except one on the wall to the right of the entrance, which still bears traces of the crucifix speaking to S. Francis. The actual crucifix was conveyed to the chapel of San Giorgio when the nuns of S. Clare left S. Damiano for the convent within the city walls.

A door beside the chief altar leads to the choir, a square low-vaulted room, with ancient stalls and reading-desk ; passing from this, through a confessional, a few steps to the left lead down to the ancient choir of S. Clare, where the worm-eaten stalls are still preserved in their place. In one

corner is shown a narrow recess, of sufficient height to contain an upright figure of low stature, into which the wall is supposed to have miraculously withdrawn Francis from his father's pursuit. This room, then, would seem, as Miss Duff Gordon justly remarks, to have been attached to the chapel when Francis first came here. From this choir a flight of old, foot-worn stone steps lead up to the oratory of S. Clare, but before this is reached we pass through a low doorway into the tiny paved courtyard, still fragrant with stocks and madonna-flower, known as S. Clare's garden. It is enclosed now on three sides by the walls of the convent buildings, but looks out through the olive gardens to the south-western hills. It was no doubt in this little garden that Clare often entertained her friend when he came for her counsel and companionship. In S. Clare's time, before additions were made to this simple group of rooms built for her and her companions, it would lie open also to the south and south-east, forming a piazza or open terrace, from which she could look across the lower wooded slopes of Subasio to her father's castle on Sasso Rosso, and beyond it to the dark procession of cypresses down the hillside, marking the cemetery of Spello. With this spot is associated the beautiful story which the shepherds of Subasio have treasured among their store of oral

traditions, a story little known, but entirely true to the Franciscan spirit. One day when Francis and Clare were going to Vallegloria to visit the convent there, they went to the inn at Spello to get some food. Now the people in the inn began to talk together, discussing the two companions and saying that it was a scandal for a man and woman who were not married always to go about together, under veil of holiness. And they did not hide their displeasure from Francis and Clare. And Francis humbly asked them for something to eat. Now it was a Friday; and the people of the house, willing to put him to shame, set before him a fowl. So Francis was set between two rules, the rule of the Church which forbade him to eat flesh on Friday, and the rule of his Order which forbade him to refuse anything which was set before him. And whilst the people of the house were enjoying his dilemma, Francis made the sign of the cross above the fowl, and immediately it flew away and a fish took its place. And when they had eaten they left the place. But when they were come to the cemetery outside Spello they began to talk together of what had happened. And they were heavy-hearted at the reports spread concerning them. And Clare wept in great sorrow that such things should be said, and complained of men's impurity and dulness. And Francis was sad

too, but he said : " My little sister, it is plain that we must consider the weakness of men, and not go on this journey together." And Clare knelt before him and said : " My father, tell me what to do." And Francis said : " Go back to S. Damiano, and I will go back to the Portiuncula, and we will live separately." So Clare went silently and sadly on her way, and Francis walked with slow and heavy steps through the woods to the Portiuncula. But he had not gone far when he heard Clare calling gently after him : " Brother Francis, brother Francis !" and he turned to meet her. And she said : " You did not put a limit to our parting. When shall we meet again ?" And Francis answered in some confusion : " When the roses flower on Monte Subasio." Now it was mid-winter, and the snow lay thick on the ground. And Clare turned back again on her way. But when she had gone a few steps, the snow began to break away around her, and the green briar bushes pushed through it, covered with fragrant summer roses. And Clare filled her apron with them and ran again after Francis, calling to him as before. And when he saw the roses he was filled with joy, and kissed Clare his sister. And from that time forth they were never parted from each other, but lived always together, seeing the blessing of God on their companionship.

This is the shepherds' happy ending ; but would Clare's meal with Francis at the Portiuncula have loomed so large if their intercourse had in the later days been indeed so constant and untrammelled ? That Francis would have willed it should be, we cannot doubt ; but the dulness of men did not melt like the snow on Subasio, nor flower swiftly as the briars into understanding and love ; and Clare had asked often to take part with the brothers in their meal, before Francis sent to fetch her from the settlement of S. Damiano.

Before the vision of the Crucifix, we have no knowledge of his association with S. Damiano, but there is little doubt that in his wanderings among the woodland slopes below the city, he turned in there often to pray—and perhaps had already won the goodwill of the poor old priest who tended it, by his gracious and loving behaviour. The fortunes of S. Damiano were linked closely with those of S. Francis from the day when his meditation in the cave outside the city became concentrated here into the resolve to devote himself wholly to the imitation of Jesus Christ in his service of the humblest and poorest of mankind. The Legend of the Three Companions, as in everything relating to his early life, cannot be surpassed for simplicity and directness. “As Francis was riding past the church of S. Damiano, he was moved by

the spirit to go in and pray. And as he prayed the crucifix seemed to speak to him : ' Francis, dost thou not see that my house is falling into decay ? Go then, and repair it for me.' And he said in fear and trembling : ' I will gladly do it, Lord,' for he thought that the church of S. Damiano was meant, which on account of its great age threatened to fall very soon. Now after that talk he was so filled and illumined with joy and light that he truly felt in his soul the crucified Christ who had spoken to him."

And the chronicler adds that henceforth the image of Christ was always in his heart. This indication of the direction of Francis' thought at this early date is most suggestive in view of the impression on his body after many years of this intensely and constantly vivid mental image. Already the personality of Jesus had become for Francis the centre and core of his own being. He never proceeded to an apprehension of the surpassingly serene intellect of his Master, but in as far as his realisation of Christ's nature reached, he became himself the medium in which, with true creative energy, he stamped the image he had conceived, and thus brought near to men, as a realised fact, the Man of Sorrows, whom they knew only in cold and staring aloofness on the conventional crucifix, or as the refrain of unintelligible chants.



After the vision of the crucified in S. Damiano, Francis, taking with him materials of many colours, which he had appropriated from his father's shop, went to Foligno and sold them, together with his horse, returning on foot to S. Damiano. The poor old priest who tended it was at first afraid to receive the money which Francis pressed on him, and was a little doubtful as to the wisdom of harbouring the impetuous youth ; but he did not refuse to let him take up his abode there, and Francis, by his energy and determination in restoring the chapel, soon convinced him of the sincerity of his devotion.

But he was not yet free to carry on the work to which he had set himself. All the pride and vanity of Bernardone revolted against the extravagances of his son, and he opened a campaign against him. Francis, already overwrought by the intensity of his spiritual experiences, felt himself at first unable to encounter the blustering, whirlwind wrath of his father, and to set himself and the old priest free from constant invasions of S. Damiano, secreted himself for a month in a cave near the city—perhaps the scene of his former meditations ; for it appears to have been known to one of his father's household, who, the Legend relates, used sometimes to bring him food. Strengthened by this short spell of rest and freedom from the nervous agitation of a fruitless discussion, he ven-

tured into the city determined to face the interview with his father which he knew such an act would provoke. But he had made other enemies. The unusual need expect no mercy from the majority till it has asserted by tangible proof its superiority to criticism ; the crowd will respect a man who can show fight successfully, and it was Francis' proud and successful encounter with his father which soon after won the townsfolk to his side and gave him his first hold over them.

But for the present he was worse than unusual : he had been a social hero, and he was making himself ridiculous : his former companions were ashamed of extravagances such as these, and allowed him to be pursued with stones through the piazzas. He must have indeed presented a strange contrast with his former princely appearance. The spirit which made him lordly then was not quelled now, and very soon asserted itself ; but he was worn and dishevelled after his long privation and solitary confinement, and he had not yet given proof of his independence and fighting power. The Legend of the Three Companions vividly and briefly relates what took place. "Now when the news that he was there spread through the squares and streets of the city, it came also to his father. And he, hearing what was being done to him by the townsfolk, rose up straightway to seek him, not to re-

lease him from them, but rather to secure his ruin (*ad perdendum*).” The meeting of the two must have been a dramatic one. Anyone who has been the object of merely dispassionate curiosity in an Italian town will have no difficulty in picturing the scene—every corner and archway, which a moment before seemed quiet and unpeopled, suddenly swarming with life, the excited and voluble crowds of curious townsfolk streaming up the steep streets to the Central Piazza, where, under the noble shadow of the great Minerva temple, the meeting took place.

The spectacle was not a long one ; Francis could not physically withstand his father had he wished to do so. He was haled to Bernardone’s house,<sup>1</sup> apparently defeated, and imprisoned for several days “in carcere tenebroso,” from which his mother’s anxiety for his health at last released him.

Practical wisdom suggested to Francis that he must find support before he again encountered his father, who meanwhile, enraged by his escape, repaired to the Communal Palace, requiring his son. The case was referred, by Francis’ special appeal, to the ecclesiastical court, and then took place the scene which first began to turn the tide of prejudice in his favour, a scene too familiar in

<sup>1</sup> The house and shop of Bernardone still stand, in the Via Portica, a few doors below the Central Piazza.

painting and story to need repetition, when Francis, by the bishop's advice, returned his father's money, and as if rending off his last fetter of filial dependence, stripped himself naked of the clothes which Bernardone's money had bought.

He now set about repairing the ruined chapel. Already his personal influence and his courageous spirit were beginning to work. Though some still mocked him as a madman, many were moved to tears and even to help him in the work of restoration. And now the labours and privations which soon undermined his frail body began in earnest. He bore stones on his shoulders to encourage the workers, and when he found that the old priest was making an effort to provide him with accustomed delicacies, beyond his means, his alertly sensitive nature took alarm, and he resolved to go begging for himself in the city. This demanded a real effort of will. His delicate taste revolted at first against the mixed fragments which he collected, and it needed some exercise of his gaiety and determination to overcome his repugnance.

During these early times, Francis' proud, sensitive nature had often to wrestle with itself. One instance of this is given in the Legend of the Three Companions, in connexion with his difficulty in procuring oil for the little church of which he had constituted himself the mason. "Now whilst

he was hard at work on the church mentioned above, desiring that two lamps should be kept burning in the church, he went about through the city begging oil ; but when he drew near to one of the houses, and saw men assembled there, to amuse themselves, he went away ashamed to beg alms before them." But he was soon more ashamed of his own cowardice, and "returning to the house, with fervour of spirit, he begged oil in French for the love of God, for the lamps of the church aforesaid."

This little indication of the tongue used by Francis is not insignificant. It always seems to denote the stage of his spiritual exaltation. It was natural to him in moments of self-forgotten enthusiasm to break out into French, although, as the Three Companions note, "he could not speak it well."

Bernardone, who had had great pride in his brilliant and attractive son, was overcome with grief at his defection. It was his bitter lot to see Francis daily about the streets as a wretched mendicant, begging the food under which his own table groaned, while the parents had no appetite to eat. He could in no wise unravel this strange freak ; he was driven almost to frenzy by his wife's reproachful tears, and the ill-disguised comments of his neighbours, and his puzzled grief, far more

surely than his hatred, found vent in curses. Francis' reception of the paternal curse, to which he was not insusceptible, is curiously characteristic of the objective and pictorial nature of his thought. He took a beggar for his father, who should counteract by blessings the curses of Bernardone.

We need not allot to Bernardone a severer judgment than the world generally passes on parents who having predetermined the current of a child's career, not perhaps without a hope of their own exaltation in his success, cast him off, when he will no longer strut as hero on the stage of their material dreams, and is not even affrighted by the vision of an empty purse. Time, which has canonised Francis, has been of material assistance to those who would sit in judgment on Bernardone; but he had not this infallible guide to wisdom after the event; he had only public opinion and common sense to direct him, and imagination lent him no key to Francis' nature. Is it strange that his coarser wit failed to discern an underlying principle of unity in the seeming inconsistencies of his son's action? What was this excess of poverty but an exaggerated freak of youth, as his former extravagance had been?—only less creditable to his parents, who had before complained half in jest that Francis' standard of living was less suited to their son than

to the son of a great prince. At one time Francis had been so wrapt up in his companions "that he would often rise from table, even though he had eaten very little, leaving his parents in distress at such a disorderly retreat." To this phase succeeded one of uncharacteristic carefulness, when Francis saved his food at table and set it secretly aside to carry to his poor friends. There are few to whom enthusiasm is acceptable or even intelligible, and Bernardone was not one of them. He saw nothing in his son's actions but successive freaks, which he had condoned when they ministered indirectly to his pride, and seemed a not undistinguished sowing of wild oats, but which assumed a different complexion now that his business prospects were involved, and Francis seemed to be casting his career and his dignity to the winds. Explanation was no doubt impossible between the two ; it certainly does not seem to have been attempted. Francis had laid himself open to the charge of inconsiderateness, and had been quite slow in realising that his father's goods were not his to sell, for whatever purpose he might need the money. Bernardone no doubt felt that this last act of appropriation showed a moral indifference to the law of Mine and Thine, which he could not afford to overlook. We may realise to the full his intemperance and worldly wisdom, but it is surely unnecessary to attribute his act to



vindictiveness and avarice ; it is after all no uncommon course for a father to pursue, and in such circumstances is generally condoned.

After the completion of S. Damiano we have no recorded connexion of Francis with it, till the establishment there of S. Clare and her companions. The little chapel was a gift to them by the Benedictines of Monte Subasio, to whom already Francis was indebted for the Portiuncula and the Carceri. A humble dwelling was erected round the chapel in which the Lesser Sisters were to carry on substantially the same life as the Brothers at the Portiuncula, while the latter took on themselves the task of providing them with food. There was almost daily intercourse between S. Damiano and the little community of Brothers, for the Portiuncula could be reached in half an hour from S. Damiano, by following the Via Francesca<sup>1</sup> directly from the

<sup>1</sup> Soon after leaving S. Damiano may be seen among the fields to the right of the Via Francesca the ancient chapel of S. Masseo, built in 1081 by Lupone, Count of Assisi. The form of the apse is still distinctly seen above the crypt, which alone is now intact, with low vaulting and pillars rudely formed with roughly carved capitals. They are lacking in the beauty of design remarkable in those of S. Benedetto. The altar is a short round pillar, supporting a slab of stone, after the manner of that represented by Giotto in his fresco of S. Damiano. Its preservation is of peculiar interest as one of many instances of his adherence to an architectural model when such was attainable. This part of the territory of Assisi is the Marignano from which brother Masseo came.



gate of the convent to the crossways, now marked by a cross, and turning then to the left down the Roman road to Rivo Torto and S. Maria Madalena, and thence in a few minutes to the Portiuncula.

We have already alluded to Francis' frequent presence at S. Damiano. It is memorable above all for the composition of the "Laudes Domini,"<sup>1</sup> after a wretched night of discomfort and sleepless pain, passed there during his last long illness "in a little cell made of rushes," which S. Clare had prepared for him. The weakness of his eyes had increased so greatly that for forty days Francis could see no light at all, and he was now on his way to visit the eye-doctor at Rieti, but was compelled, on account of his infirmity, to delay his journey another day.<sup>2</sup> Mice invaded his cell and made rest or prayer impossible. It seems unlikely that S. Clare, in her watchful love for her friend, should have allowed Francis to remain, as the *Speculum* seems to suggest, forty days in a cell infested with mice. However this may be, on the last night of his stay, the sense of his afflictions was suddenly swallowed up in the consciousness of his participation even now in God's kingdom. "And rising on the morrow he said to his com-

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 100.

<sup>2</sup> *Fioretti*, xix.

panions : ‘If an emperor were to give his entire kingdom to one of his servants, ought not that servant to rejoice greatly ? But if he were to give him his whole empire, ought he not much more to rejoice ?’ And he said to them : ‘Therefore I must rejoice greatly in my infirmities and tribulations and be comforted in the Lord, and give thanks always to God the Father and His only Son the Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit for the great grace done to me by the Lord, since He has deigned to assure me, His unworthy servant, even whilst living in the flesh, of His kingdom. Therefore to His praise and our consolation and edification I desire shortly to make a new thanksgiving for the creatures of the Lord which we use daily, and without which we cannot live, and concerning which the human race greatly offends the Creator. And we are constantly ungrateful for such grace and favour, not praising the Lord, the Creator and Giver of all good things, as we ought.’

“And sitting down, he began to meditate a little while, and then he said : ‘*Altissimo, omnipotente bono Signore,*’ etc., and he made a song about this, and taught it to his companions that they might say it and sing it. For his spirit was so filled with consolation and sweetness that he wanted to send for brother Pacifico, who in the world had been called ‘King of Verses,’ and was a most skilful

teacher of singers, and he wanted to give him a few Brothers that they might go with him through the world preaching and singing the 'Laudes Domini.' For he said that he wanted him who could preach best among them to preach to the people, and after the sermon that all should sing together the 'Laudes Domini' as the Lord's minstrels.

"And when he had finished the Lauds, he wanted the preacher to say to the people: 'We are the Lord's minstrels, and for these Lauds we want to have our reward from you, namely, that you may live in true penitence.' And he said: 'For what are the servants of God if not His minstrels, who must lift the hearts of men and move them to spiritual joy?'

"And especially he said this of the Lesser Brothers, who are given to God's people for their salvation."

The last visit of Francis to S. Damiano was paid after his death, when the little procession, bearing his body for burial from S. Maria degli Angeli to S. Giorgio, halted there to receive Clare's farewell to her friend.<sup>1</sup>

The monastic rule still prevails at S. Damiano,

<sup>1</sup> The scene is fancifully depicted in the Upper Church of S. Francesco, in a fresco attributed to Giotto. The ornate façade of the chapel, from which the nuns are issuing, can scarcely be his handiwork.

owing to the generous patronage of Lord Ripon, who, after the dissolution of the convent, purchased it from the government and re-established the brothers in the enjoyment of their former privileges.

Near to S. Damiano, but seldom troubled by one of human-kind, is a glade of rare beauty, such as in the thirteenth century must have been familiar enough, though they have vanished now with the changing character of the plain and mountain side. Deep buried among olive gardens and waving fields of corn and sanfoin lies the bed of a narrow spring, which, fed from two sources midway between the Porta Nuova and the lowest boundary of S. Damiano, flows through long cool grasses in a tiny freshet of transparent water. Its bed is marked by tall poplars and spreading oaks, which, in this land of ruthless woodmanship, are conspicuous for their beauty of form and noble stature. Through the trees the distant blue mountains are seen in faint, mysterious background, transparent to the vision as sea or sky. A gentle trickling betrays the tiny stream, half-hidden among the tall rushes and long river-grasses which crowd round it to guard it from profanity. The steep sides of the glade which cradles it are fragrant in spring with a sweet, faint scent of acacia bushes, and the oaks are dear to nightingales. Scarcely remote from the

meadows, this glade is yet rich in deep woodland treasures and eloquent of bygone forest memories, which are well-nigh driven from the cultivated plain and mountain slopes around the city.

It is not vain to try and fashion from such living relics the form and features of the buried past. In Nature there is a continuity of significance, which, if no rude hand of man or unknown force have interposed, survives the passage of time, and draws together her sons of distant generations. The wild forest stretches of the plain have long given place to green and fertile vegetation, the upper mountain is naked and bare of trees, and olive gardens and orchards can spread far on its lower slopes without fear of devastation ; but echoes of the forest which Francis knew and loved still haunt this half-buried glade, and sometimes through the olive boughs distance seems to crowd the spaced and characterless trees of the plain into a dense woodland thicket.

This plain is mysterious in its changeful countenance ; more even than the mountains, it eludes enduring definition. In the full, unsparing noon it is oppressive in its green and brown monotony, expressionless and flat ; but when wind and cloud conspire to beautify, it is born to countless transformations, and its features are cast anew in beauty. Cloud-shadows brood, or wind-winged

sweep across it, breaking its wide monotony ; and sometimes at dawn or nightfall thin mists float from it, where it is folded in the low hollows of the mountains.

But it is on a cloudy day of the south-west wind, when light is clear and pale, that the plain is most marvellously transfigured. Far down the Spoleto valley roll the dim blue waves of the earth-ocean till they are lost in the folding mountains, and the white specks of houses sown over the broad plain show like scudding sails in sunlight on a stormy sea, while here and there a gleam lights up an emerald island in the grey expanse.

RIVO TORTO.—The identity of the earliest shelter of the Franciscan community has been the subject of a heated controversy, long carried on with that peculiar virulence which seems always to attend the union of piety with self-interest.

The privilege of occupation by S. Francis is still claimed by the large convent of Rivo Torto, situated on the road leading from Cannara to Foligno, at least a mile and a half from S. Maria degli Angeli. The conventual brothers of Rivo Torto found a ready apologist in Pompeo Bini, in his time a noted citizen of Assisi, and later one of their number, whose curious work, *La Verita Scoperta*, appeared in 1721. His arguments are

ingenious, but not more convincing than the subtleties by which Padre Angelo, author of the *Collis Paradisi*, tries to justify the claim of S. Francesco to the headship and parentage of the Order.

Bini bases his argument on the existence of a tablet in the convent church, not discovered, be it noted, till 1586, recording the presence there, in 1270, of B. Egidio Capozzi of Assisi, and in 1294 of Conrad of Offida. He even pretends to use an argument from locality to support his thesis, proving with satisfaction to himself, and perhaps with conviction to those who are unacquainted with the topography of Assisi, that his convent of Rivo Torto is on the former Roman road from Assisi to Cannara, when it is obviously nearly a mile to the left of it. He also attempts to apply to his convent the statement of the early writer, Bartoli, that Rivo Torto was a short mile beyond S. Maria degli Angeli (*per spatium parvi milliaris*), and close to the leper hospital, though, as we have seen, it is considerably over a mile distant, nor has any leper-hospital been known to exist near it.

The accepted tradition of the convent ascribes its origin to one Zaccardo, who lived on the slopes of Subasio, and built a little oratory in a plot of ground above the winding brook from which it took its name. Right and left were two little

rooms—one for himself, the other for a hermit. Bini declares that this habitation fell into disuse and decay, and was then repaired and dwelt in by Francis. Documents, however, prove that before 1455 no building of any kind existed on the site of the present convent, and in the archives of the city of Assisi, a protocol is extant of June 14th, 1455,<sup>1</sup> giving license to F. Francisco Sacardino to build a maesta in the district of Rivo Torto called Ponticello.

But even without this document, falsifying the traditional view of its origin, the Legend of the Three Companions and the *Speculum Perfectionis* contain sufficient indications of the intention, size, and above all, position of the cabin at Rivo Torto, to disprove the authenticity of the present convent.

It seems clear that this hut was originally intended simply as a shelter for travellers and their beasts, like the now ruined Fontenelle, a few minutes distant from the Porta S. Giacomo.<sup>2</sup> These little refuges were provided for belated travellers at a short distance from all the city gates,

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Melchiorri.

<sup>2</sup> A square stone in the wall bears an inscription telling the purpose of the building, and in a niche above is a portrait of its patron, S. Anthony; on the right, a hole in the wall for an offering, and beside the little shelter a spring for the refreshment of man and beast.



which shut at sundown.<sup>1</sup> The story quoted later of the man with the ass, who rudely intruded on the brothers, corroborates this view of the purpose of Rivo Torto. His intention was no doubt to discourage the beginnings of an apparently permanent settlement. His action would have been impossible had the tenure of the brothers been more secure.

It must be added, that while still retaining the character of a wayside shelter common to all, which function the peasant wished to emphasise, the hut at Rivo Torto had, by the time Francis went to stay there, come to be regarded as connected in a special way with the leper hospital of S. Maria Maddalena, scarcely more than a few hundred yards beyond it.

Padre Angelo, in whom desire to believe seems to have bred an unquestioning faith in the authenticity of his own convent, assumes that it is beyond question, and naively points out that statements of the early biographers concerning the extreme con-

<sup>1</sup> Padre Leo, in his edition of Bartoli, has the following note :  
"In loco qui dicitur Rigus Tortus, erat quoddam tugurium derelictum, quod, pecudibus vel itinerantium jumentis pro stabulo gratuito sicut et ipsis iratoribus pro momentanes refugio inserviebat; siquidem omnibus patens erat. Ibi, nisi habitationem transitoriam non habuerunt Fratres, nec aderat ecclesia. Hic de causis Franciscus non multo post illud deserere coactus est, et ad S. Mariam revertere.

finement of Rivo Torto were incorrect. Twelve, he says, could easily kneel in the oratory of the convent! On which Padre Leo justly comments: "Must we conclude from this that the place of which he treats is not the Rivo Torto of S. Francis, or that the old writers were liars and deceivers who speak of the straitness of the place?" He decides in favour of the former alternative.

Both from position, size, and intention, all of which correspond with the scanty but precise indications of the early companions of S. Francis, it seems plain that the humble building on the Roman road running between Assisi and Cannara, is the true Rivo Torto of the early biographers.

From the Porta Moiano a steep, stony path leads down beside the bed of a narrow stream to a simple cross, at the juncture of this, the Roman road, with the Via Francesca. It was at these cross-roads that Giles, going out from the city to join himself to Francis, prayed for guidance as to the direction he must take to find him, being yet unaware of his abode in Rivo Torto. Crossing the ditch, the road continues, now on the right of the stream, till at about forty minutes' walk from the Porta Moiano a path on the left leads past a small half-roofed stone outhouse to a little house built of large blocks of native stone, with a flight of steps outside, and a covered portico. Besides these comparatively re-

cent additions, the tiny cabin was increased, in the century subsequent to S. Francis, by the little chapel of S. Rufino d'Arce, a probably mythical saint of Assisi, who is supposed to have suffered death by drowning in the well near by. The chapel, which forms part of the building, is marked by a bell in a pink-painted shelter on the roof above the door. To the left of the door is a rough Roman relief. The dwelling-room of the peasants, which once perhaps sheltered the first Lesser Brothers, is low, and blackened with smoke, which has to escape by door or window since there is no chimney.

The inhabitants recognise no saintly associations but with S. Rufino d'Arce.<sup>1</sup> A few yards further, across a ploughed field, is the chapel of S. Maria Maddalena, forming one of a small clump of buildings, now immediately beside the railway line. This was the chapel of the leper settlement. It is now used as a storehouse for apples and potatoes, and mass seems to be said here only a few times in the year. The apse, shadowed by a branching fig-tree, is narrower than the rest of the chapel, and curved like those of all the wayside chapels; the arch of the door has a slightly pointed curve. This

<sup>1</sup> Arce is the name common to the surrounding fields. Rivo Torto also describes the situation of the cabin in the neighbourhood of the tortuous stream.

little leper chapel has additional interest, as another example of Francis' efforts in masonry.

The sojourn at Rivo Torto marks the first effort of the little Franciscan community, then numbering only three, to associate themselves with the lepers, to whose care they were to regard themselves as specially dedicate.

This decision was the last conquest by Francis of his old prejudices. The formulated principle underlying his dedication was perhaps not greatly different from that of other ascetics: "*Omnia quæ carnaliter dilexisti et habere disiderasti, oportet te contemnere et odire, si meam vis cognoscere voluntatem.*"<sup>1</sup>

But the cold, unnatural formula was quickened by his love into a real principle of life. He may seem to us to have done violence to his nature, in certain directions to have refused his faculties their exercise; but he never admitted, nay, rather condemned, that cult of dreary joylessness, that sterilisation of the springs of life, which makes many of the saintly records a weary display of mummy-wrap, a dull, featureless negation of life. Francis did not leave joy behind him "in saeculo." He did not, like the grim German re-

<sup>1</sup> "Whatever thou didst love in the flesh and desire to have, thou must spurn and hate, if thou wouldst know my will."

formers, or like the ascetic so admirably typified in the Paphnuce of *Thaïs*,<sup>1</sup> associate imagination with the devil. His personification of Poverty is that of a lover : his love took even the sting from leprosy, from which his delicate nature had recoiled before the dedication of his life to its service. This abhorrence conquered, he made the service of lepers one of the principal duties of the Lesser Brothers.

“In truth, that which first seemed bitter to him is turned into sweetness. For, as I said, so bitter was the sight of lepers to him, that not only he would not look on them, but would not even go near their dwellings. And if he happened at times to pass their houses, or to see them, although he was moved by pity to give them alms through the medium of another person, yet he always turned his face away, and covered his nostrils with his hands. But, by God’s grace, he became so much the associate and friend of lepers that, as is witnessed in his will, he dwelt among them and likewise served them.”<sup>2</sup>

Rivo Torto, the lepers’ shelter, was, as we have seen, only a few steps from the leper hospital of S. Maria Maddalena, with which the Brothers were

<sup>1</sup> Anatole France.

<sup>2</sup> *Legenda Trium Sociorum*. Cf. *Spec. Perf.*, 44 : “He wished the brothers to dwell in leper hospitals.”

in constant communication, making use of its little chapel, till provided with S. Maria degli Angeli. The Legend of the Three Companions gives precise indications as to the dimensions of this first dwelling, and the mode of life adopted by the Brothers.

“Hitherto the father had lived with the others in a place near to Assisi which is called Rivo Torto, where there was a hut which men had deserted, and this place was so narrow that they had scarcely room to sit or lie down there. Being very often in lack of bread they ate beans alone, which they begged here and there with difficulty. The man of God wrote the names of the brothers on the beams of the hut, so that whoever wished to rest or pray might know his place, lest, on account of the narrowness and smallness of the place, an unaccustomed noise might disturb the silence of his mind.

“Now one day, while the brothers were living in this place, it chanced that a peasant came there with his ass, intending to shelter in the cabin with his ass ; and fearing that the brothers might refuse to let him in, he said to his ass, as he came in : ‘Come on, for this place will do well for us.’ And when the holy father took note of his words and purpose, he was greatly vexed with him for making such a noise with his ass and disturbing

all the brothers, who were then anxious for silence and prayer. So the man of God said to the brothers: 'I know, brothers, that God did not call us to prepare a shelter for asses, nor to live much in the company of men, but that we may preach to men at all times the way of salvation, giving them salutary counsel, and that we must all stand fast in prayer and thanksgiving.'"

It was this ill-mannered reminder that the place was not his own, combined with its distracting smallness, which induced Francis finally to relinquish the cabin of Rivo Torto and seek a permanent shelter scarcely half a mile away, close to the forest chapel of the Portiuncula, where he and the Brothers had already found an occasional resting-place.

In his vexation at the peasant's discourtesy, Francis may seem to have a little under-estimated the social duties of the Brothers. It is scarcely necessary to insist on the importance he attached to their intercourse with their fellows in all the serious interests of daily life, but as their associates were to be chiefly the poorest and least enlightened among men, the labours they were to share would necessarily be chiefly manual. He excused none, even those most addicted to spiritual meditation, from their share of work and the tedious duty of asking for alms in return for their labours, and he

was quick to discern when indifference to those common duties sprang from slackness and not from greater spirituality. In the early days at Rivo Torto he did not hesitate to dismiss a brother who insufficiently realised that he had joined a society of labouring men, and not a company of recluses, with whom laxity in practical things might pass for piety.

"In the first days of the Order, when the brothers were staying at Rivo Torto, near Assisi, there was a brother among them who prayed little and did no work, refused to go for alms and ate well. Blessed Francis, considering these things, recognised by the Holy Spirit that he was a carnal man, and said to him: 'Go your way, brother Fly, since you wish to eat your brothers' work and to be idle in the task of God, like an idle and sterile bee, which does not gain and does not work, and eats the work and the gain of the good bees.'

"And so he went his way, and because he was carnal, he sought no pity and found none."<sup>1</sup>

Two more incidents associated with Rivo Torto may be quoted as typical of the wise temperateness with which Francis guided the actions of the Brothers in the matter of their physical well-being. His sense of responsibility as the pattern of the

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 24.



Brothers made him in his own case overstep the limits of sane discipline which he imposed on them,<sup>1</sup> just as in the Portiuncula, which was to be the model of all other Franciscan dwellings, he demanded a rigid and almost needy simplicity, which he would not, in all cases, desire the other colonies to attain. For he realised that the mark is hard to come up with, and is seldom overshot. His general teaching is explicit as to the need of so sustaining the body that it may be a perfect instrument of the spirit.<sup>2</sup> He wisely laid down no definite rules of diet, but in all things that were consistent with simplicity, required of the Brothers that each be guided in this matter by the needs of his own nature, the only test being that of greatest serviceableness. He would not treat the question on a basis of abstract right and wrong, but only in relation to individuals, implying that irrational excess in abnegation, as in satisfaction, was self-indulgence, though perhaps in the former case more dangerous, because more subtly alluring.

Leo, an eye-witness of the scene, gives a vivid picture of Francis' method of treating an unreasonable self-denial of bodily needs. "Once at the time when blessed Francis began to have brothers, and was staying with them at Rivo Torto, near Assisi, it happened that one night,

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 27.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 97.

when all the brothers were asleep, about midnight one of the brothers called out and said : 'I am dying, I am dying.' And all the brothers woke up in horror and fear. And blessed Francis got up and said : 'Arise, brothers, and kindle a light.' And when the light was kindled, he said : 'Who is he that said, I am dying ?' The brother replied : 'It is I.' And he said to him : 'What is wrong with you, brother ?' And he said : 'I am dying of hunger.'

"Then blessed Francis had a meal prepared at once, and as a man full of love and discernment, ate with him, lest he might be ashamed to eat alone, and at his desire all the other brothers ate also.

"Now that brother and all the rest had been newly converted to the Lord, and were afflicting their bodies beyond measure. And after the meal, blessed Francis said to the other brothers : 'Dear ones, I bid you each one have regard to his own nature, since though one of you may have strength to be sustained on less food than another, yet I wish that one who needs more food should not be bound to imitate him in this, but should have regard to his own nature, and assign to his body what is needful to make it a true servant of the spirit. For we are bound not only to beware of excess in eating, which hampers body and soul, but

of too great abstinence no less, nay more, inasmuch as the Lord desires mercy and not sacrifice ; and, dearest brothers,' said he, 'as to this that I have done, I mean our eating with my brother for love of him, lest he should be ashamed to eat alone, it was rather necessity and love that made me do it ; but for the rest, I tell you it is not my will to do so, for that would be neither conscientious nor honourable ; but my will is, and I enjoin upon you, that each of the brothers, as our poverty allows, satisfy his body according to his need.'"<sup>1</sup>

Another incident of the same nature, which took place in Rivo Torto, is even more touching in the considerateness it records. The story bespeaks an even closer intimacy of S. Francis with the details of his companions' physical life ; an intimacy which was impossible when their numbers had swelled, but which was almost inevitable at this early stage when they were living in so very limited a space. The stories themselves bear witness indirectly to the character of their dwelling.

"Another time, when blessed Francis was at the

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 27. Cf. *Fioretti*, xviii., where at the Chapter of Mats at the Portiuncula, Francis having heard of the iron cuirasses and rings worn next their skin by many of the Brothers, so that some died and many were hindered from praying, compelled them all to lay down these senseless instruments of torture in a great heap before him, and to leave them behind. Leo alludes to this incident in the chapter above quoted.

same place,<sup>1</sup> a brother, who was very spiritual, was ill there and very feeble. And blessed Francis, taking note of him, was moved with pity for him ; but because at that time the brothers, in health and sickness, treated poverty as abundance with great joyousness, and used no medicines in their infirmities, and even felt no need of them, but rather preferred to take things harmful to the body, blessed Francis said within himself: 'If that brother were to eat some ripe grapes in the very early morning, I believe it would do him good.'

"So he reflected and acted accordingly.

"For he got up one day in the very early morning, and called that brother secretly, and took him to a vineyard which was near the colony. And he chose a vine on which there were good grapes for eating, and, sitting with that brother near the vine, he began to eat some grapes, for fear the brother should be ashamed to eat alone. And while they were eating the brother was set free, and they praised the Lord together."

To the same period must be assigned the incident recorded in chapter 58 of the *Speculum Perfectionis*, where Francis reproves brother Jacob the Simple for leading a leper outside the gates of the

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 28 ; the subject is continued by Leo from the preceding chapter.

leper-house ; and feeling he might have caused shame to the leper by this open allusion to his malady, imposes on himself the penalty of eating with him from the same dish. It would seem that the brothers had perhaps already given up their lodging at Rivo Torto for the Portiuncula, but they are plainly still in constant communication with the leper-house almost adjoining their enclosure.

THE PORTIUNCULA, OR S. MARIA DEGLI ANGELI.—No one can read the early biographies of S. Francis, and especially the *Speculum Perfectionis*, without being struck by the explicit emphasis laid by Francis on the character of the building and the mode of life to be observed at the Portiuncula—the first and chief sanctuary of his community—to which he clung with pathetic devotion, and directed the affection of his followers with reiterated warnings against any encroachment on the simple rule of life which he felt it to symbolise and enshrine. We should expect in this place, which was to be “the model and example of all other places of the Order,” to find his explicit commands most faithfully fulfilled ; we should seek here first the true model of a Franciscan settlement.

But the humble church of the Portiuncula no longer stands as a witness against the great rival

sanctuary which, so soon after Francis' death, towered in majestic beauty from the *Collis Inferni*, an eloquent symbol of degeneracy to his few faithful friends. Not half a mile from Rivo Torto, among the level vineyards and cornfields of the plain, is a great domed Renaissance church and convent—the church and convent of S. Maria degli Angeli. In the centre of the choir, an alien in workmanship and design, stands the tiny rough-hewn chapel, whose name it has borrowed—as if, by some freak of sentiment or tardy scruple, a late-grown lord, sprung from humblest stock, should plant within his mansion in the central place of honour the hut which was his cradle and nursery; for such, indeed, is the relation between the *Portiuncula* and the mighty temple round it.

The great dome of S. Maria degli Angeli is a strange landmark among the fields and vineyards of the plain, the more so for its close juxtaposition with the unaltered wayside chapels of S. Rufino d'Arce and S. Maria Maddalena; and, within the vast building, the contrast is no less strange between its complexity and spaciousness, and the dark little chapel set in its midst, which it was built to honour.

The present great church and convent of S. Maria degli Angeli can scarcely be called a development of the original settlement which its walls enclose. The pompous temple bears so little relation to

the Portiuncula that their connexion in space does not help us to connect them. Here, far less than at S. Francesco, will the spirit of Francis be felt or understood ; for S. Maria degli Angeli is lacking in the architectural and decorative beauty which makes S. Francesco one of the finest monuments of religious art, and which, however strange in appearance as a monument to the Poverello, may claim sympathy with the artistic element in his nature. S. Maria degli Angeli seems rather the expression of an arrogant self-sufficiency than of the humble love and patient spelling at earth's laws, which crown man as builder with real victory.

The church was first built round the Portiuncula in the sixteenth century by two Perugian architects, Giulio Danti and Galeazzo Alessi, but an earthquake in 1832 destroyed the nave and choir of this outer building, leaving the cupola, and the chapel of the Portiuncula beneath it, intact.

The chapel of the Portiuncula is now decorated outside with frescoes of no merit, and hung within with votive offerings left there through the centuries by the pilgrims who made it their yearly goal on the occasion of the plenary indulgence, known as the Pardon of S. Francis ; for S. Francis, though he, as brother Leo says, "knew the kingdom of heaven to be established in every corner of the earth, and believed that the divine grace

should be given to the elect of God in every place, yet believed the place of S. Mary of the Portiuncula to be filled with more abounding grace and frequently visited by celestial spirits.”<sup>1</sup>

His belief in the omnipresence of God, his hold on the pantheism which pervades the teaching of his master Jesus, gave way before the sense of peculiar sanctification which his own deep affection led him to attach to the Portiuncula, investing it even with the power of transmitting its virtue. He would surely not withhold his sorrowful indignation from those who, in his name, have bound in degrading rites the pardoning power with which his loving imagination saw the Portiuncula endowed.<sup>2</sup>

The traditions of the Portiuncula, in the centuries before it received from Francis its final consecration, are briefly told. In the fourth century, when Liberius I. was pope, four hermits, crossing the forest which then covered the plain round Assisi, asked a portion from the lords of the city, and built there a little chapel dedicated to S. Maria di Giosofat and Maria degli Angioli Assunta in Cielo. The hermits abandoned it soon afterwards, leaving the care of it to several of their followers, who stayed there about a hundred and

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 83.

<sup>2</sup> For a full account of the church and of the Pardon of the Portiuncula, see Miss Duff Gordon's *Story of Assisi*, chap. xi.



sixty years. Benedetto da Norcia, coming to Assisi in 516, asked it of the citizens, and restored it, acquiring a small portion of ground round it, whence its name of Portiuncula, "Little Portion." When the Benedictine Order was instituted in 520, Benedetto sent a few disciples to take charge of it, and his followers lived in huts around it, till in the twelfth century they moved to the noble convent of S. Benedetto on Monte Subasio. Pious tradition has a quaint explanation for the unusually ample proportions of the doorway in the chapel of the Portiuncula. "One thing," says Mariani, "is to be noticed in the rebuilding of the same (by Benedict). Benedict desired that the two doors should be spacious, as they are seen to be; they undoubtedly appear out of proportion and unnecessarily large. How is this? Perhaps he was guided by God, seeing that in time to come they would have to give access to a great multitude of people, who would flock there to receive the Indulgence of the Pardon, which would one day be obtained from Christ by the prayer of his servant Francis."

We are not able by documents to verify the traditions of the origin of the Portiuncula, but whether or not they represent its actual history, we know that in S. Francis' youth it belonged to the Benedictines of Monte Subasio, and also that it

had been allowed by them to fall into decay, for Celano relates that S. Francis, after the repairing of S. Damiano, "moved to another place close to the city of Assisi, in which he began to rebuild a ruined church that was almost overthrown."<sup>1</sup> The next mention of the Portiuncula is in the Legend of the Three Companions, which records the first inclusion of it as an alternative dwelling with Rivo Torto.<sup>2</sup> "Now the man of God, Francis, in company with two brothers, as has been said, moved to a certain poor little church, which is called S. Mary of the Portiuncula. And they made there a little dwelling in which they also sometimes abode together." The legend also records the final removal there, attributing it to the discourtesy his Brothers had experienced at the hands of the ass-owner in Rivo Torto, and to their increasing number. "Therefore they left the aforesaid hovel, intended for the use of poor lepers, moving to S. Mary of the Portiuncula, near which they had sometimes lodged in a little house, before they obtained the church itself. In due course blessed Francis humbly acquired it from the abbot of S. Benedetto of Monte Subasio, near Assisi, re-

<sup>1</sup> *Legenda Gregorii*. A.X. (Rosedale). Though the name is not specified, the context places the identification with the Portiuncula beyond doubt.

<sup>2</sup> *Legenda Trium Sociorum*, ix.

commending it earnestly and affectionately to the General Minister and all the brothers as above all places in the world sanctified by the glorious Virgin.”<sup>1</sup>

Comparison with chapter 55 of the *Speculum Perfectionis* will show that, though in the Legend both the temporary and permanent removal of the Brothers to the neighbourhood of the Portiuncula are represented as taking place before the chapel was granted to S. Francis by the abbot of S. Benedetto, in reality only the first temporary settlement was prior to the grant.

“Blessed Francis, seeing that the Lord would multiply the number of the brothers, said to them : ‘My dearest brothers and little sons, I see that the Lord will multiply us ; therefore it seems good to me and fitting that we should obtain from the bishop or canons of S. Rufino, or from the abbot of S. Benedetto, a church where the brothers may say their hours, and only have beside it a small and mean dwelling made of mud and sticks where the brothers may rest and work ; for this place is not fit nor sufficient for the brothers, since the Lord would multiply us, and chiefly because we have here no church where the brothers may say their hours. And if a brother were to die, it would not be fit to bury him here nor in a church of the

<sup>1</sup> *L.T.S.*, xiv.

secular clergy.' And his words pleased all the brothers."

The petition to the bishop and canons was refused, and Francis then made his way to the abbey of S. Benedetto. The Portiuncula was granted to Francis "as being the smallest and by far the poorest church in their possession. And the abbot said to blessed Francis: 'Look, brother, we have granted what you asked, but if the Lord multiplies this congregation of yours, we desire that this place shall be the head of all of yours.'

"And his words pleased blessed Francis and his brothers, and blessed Francis was overjoyed at the gift of this place to the brothers, chiefly because the church was named after the mother of Christ and because it was so small and mean a church, and also because it was surnamed the Little Portion, by which was foretold that it must be the head and mother of the poor Lesser Brothers."

To deprecate any idea of independent ownership, Francis insisted on paying a yearly tribute of fish to the abbey; while the abbot, appreciating the motive, acknowledged this recognition by a gift of a jar of oil to the brothers.

The relations between S. Francis and the monks of Monte Subasio seem to have been genuine. They showed their trust in him at a time when he stood most in need of it, and expressed it, not in terms

of extravagant praise, but by a temperate fulfilment of his needs.

Henceforth the little forest settlement became, for the followers of S. Francis, the head and mother of the Order, the general gathering-place of the Brothers, where all matters of note were transacted. Later, rivalry grew up between the Portiuncula and the great convent of S. Francesco. The conventuals of the *Collis Paradisi* claimed the headship for their church in virtue of its papal consecration, and pretended to regard the exorbitant claims of the Portiuncula as a late fabrication. Their ingenious apologist, Padre Angeli of Rivo Torto, author of the *Collis Paradisi*, playfully derides the notion of confounding headship with so mean a name. "For, indeed, how by such a name as Little Portion head and mother can be meant, my feeble wit cannot understand; for if it is a question of the body, it means a small portion of the body rather than the head, which conspicuously dominates the whole; if we are talking of generation, it would rather seem to describe a little daughter, who is a small portion of the mother, than the mother herself." Childish quibbles such as these passed for rational argument in a controversy where self-interest was one of the chief disputants.

But for Bonaventura's suppression of all Lives of S. Francis save his own, which claimed to com-

prise all worthy records of the Saint, so strange a neglect of his reiterated injunctions would have been impossible. The *Speculum Perfectionis* does not tire of repeating Francis' praise of the Portiuncula, his exhortations to the Brothers to cleave to it above all other places. "Therefore he often said to the brothers : ' See, my sons, that you never leave this place ; if you are driven out at one point come in at another, for this place is holy and the abode of Christ and of the Virgin his mother.' " <sup>1</sup>

The permanence of interest and possession which he here seems to advocate was, indeed, opposed to the detachment with which he ordinarily required that the brothers should hold themselves related to the land or dwellings granted them ; for the Portiuncula was not only the place most beloved of S. Francis, it was the centre and symbol of Franciscan unity, the patria of the Order.

But if certain spiritual privileges were held by S. Francis to attach to the Portiuncula, he allowed it no material privileges, no superiority in form or comeliness. As parent of the Order of Lesser Brothers it must set an example of humble poverty, and bear the stamp of their profession ; as headquarters of their Lady Poverty it must reflect the character of its mistress. Francis' feeling with regard to this is illustrated in his reproof of a Vicar

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 83.

of the Order, who took on himself to have another dwelling built for the accommodation of the great assembly of Brothers ; for it was there only that they could be received into the Order.<sup>1</sup> S. Francis had been away, and only returned in time to hear the last strokes of the workmen's hammers. When he had satisfied himself as to the reason of the noise, he called the vicar and said : " Brother, this place is the pattern and example of the whole religion, and for this reason I would rather that the brothers of this place should bear tribulations and inconvenience for the love of God, and that the other brothers who come here should carry back a good example to their places, than that the brothers here should have their consolations in full measure, and the others take an example for building in their places, and say : ' In that place of Blessed Mary of the Little Portion, which is the first place of the Order, buildings of such and such kind and size are set up, so we, too, may very well build them in our places.' "

Another incident of the same kind, though more dramatic, also occurred at the Portiuncula.<sup>2</sup> Both plainly took place late in S. Francis' life, and are suggestive of deeper apprehension than is apparent on the surface. The precision of his reply in the incident related above indicates his realisation of the

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 7.



creeping evil, and his determination to allow it no material to feed on. It is plain from both stories that it was no mere fruitless asceticism which prompted his resolute refusal to accept any extension of the wretched accommodation, but a constant and watchful consideration for the other branches of his Order. He never allowed himself to forget his capacity of leader and law-giver to many men whose espousal of poverty was neither so impassioned nor so pure as his own.

“As the General Conference was drawing near, which was held every year at S. Mary of the Portiuncula, the people of Assisi, considering that the brothers were multiplying daily, and that all met every year in that place, as they had nothing but one small hut roofed with thatch, and its walls of sticks and mud, took counsel, and in a few days, with the greatest haste and devotion, made a great house of stones and mortar, without the consent of blessed Francis, and indeed while he was away in one of the provinces. And when blessed Francis returned, and had come to the Conference, he was greatly surprised to see the house built there ; and because he was afraid that other brothers, using this house as a pretext, might cause great houses to be made in the same way in places where they were staying or were in future to stay, also because he wished that place to be the pattern and example for



all other colonies of the Order, he went up on to the roof of the house before the Conference was over, and bade the brothers come up too, and securing the help of the brothers, began to throw on the ground the tiles with which it had been roofed, wishing to destroy it to the very foundations. But some soldiers of Assisi, who were there to guard the place on account of the crowd of market-folk who had assembled to see the conference of the brothers, seeing that blessed Francis and the brothers with him wished to throw down the house, went to him at once and said to him : ' Brother, this house belongs to the Communalty of Assisi, and it is on behalf of the Communalty that we are here. We therefore forbid you to destroy our house.' Hearing this, blessed Francis said : ' If it is yours, then I do not wish to touch it.' And he and the other brothers came down from it at once. For this cause the people of the city of Assisi decreed that from that time forward the government of the city, whatever it was, should be bound to keep it in repair. And every year for a long period of time this statute was observed."

In several places Francis expressly states his reasoned feeling against the use of stone in the shelters of the brothers. Its stability and durability seemed to him at variance with their temporary character. Thus the specious argument that in

some places wood was dearer than stone could not alter his purpose. He was too ill and weary to contend with opposition, but his will bears the words : " Let the brothers see that they in no wise receive either churches or dwellings or any other buildings which are made for them save as befits holy poverty, but let them be guests there, like pilgrims and strangers."<sup>1</sup>

The visit of Ugolino, bishop of Ostia, to the Portiuncula, recorded in the *Speculum*, chapter 21, supplies us with a picture of the practice of the Brothers within the dwelling. " When the lord of Ostia, who was afterwards Pope Gregory, had come to the Conference of the brothers at S. Mary of the Portiuncula, he went into the house with a number of soldiers and priests to see where the brothers slept, and seeing that they lay on the ground, and had nothing under them except a little straw and some wretched mattresses, torn, almost all, and no pillows, he began to weep vehemently before them all, and said : ' See, this is where the brothers sleep, and we wretched people use so many luxuries. What, then, will become of us ? ' So he and all the rest were greatly edified. And he saw no table there, because the brothers in that place always took their meals upon the ground."

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, II. The account of the Chapter of Mats, chapter 68, completes this picture.

Bishop Ugolino's reflexion on his own state shows how little he understood the motive force of Francis' abnegation. It was not a method of insurance against future pains, nor a morbid emphasis on the virtue of negation, but rather a question of comparative values, the assertion of a greater over a lesser good.

His distinction between the need of desire and the need of reason<sup>1</sup> is both sane and philosophical. "Indeed, he used to assert that a need betrayed by desire and not by reason was the mark of a quenched spirit. 'When the spirit is chill,' he said, 'and little by little is losing the warmth of grace, the flesh and the blood must needs demand the things that are theirs.' And he would say: 'For what remains, when the soul lacks spiritual delights, except that the flesh turn again to the fleshly, and then the animal desire shelters itself under the name of necessity, conscience then is moulded by the feeling of the flesh.'"

The ideal picture of a Franciscan interior in chapter xxiii. of the *Sacrum commercium* so accurately illustrates the normal conditions of life at the Portiuncula that it may well find a place here. It will be remembered that Lady Poverty, after her meeting with Francis and his companions, had consented to go home with them.

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 15.

“And when everything was made ready, they called her to dine with them. And she said: ‘Shew me first your oratory, cloister, chapter-house, refectory, kitchen, dormitory, and stable, your chairs of state, your polished tables, and your great halls. For I see none of them, though I notice that you are cheerful, gay, brimming over with joy, and full of good comfort, as if you expect everything you desire to be granted you.’ And they answered her, and said: ‘Our lady and queen, we your servants are weary from our long journey, and you, who have come with us, have had no light labour. Let us therefore dine first, if you will, and when we are refreshed, everything shall be done according to your suggestion.’ And she said: ‘What you say pleases me; but now bring some water that we may wash our hands, and towels that we may dry them.’ And they hastened to bring half an earthen jar full of water, for there was no whole one there. And pouring some over her hands, they looked hither and thither for a towel. And when they could not find it, one of them offered her the tunic he had on, to dry her hands. And she gave thanks when she saw it, and with her whole heart praised God, who had made her the companion of such men. Then they led her into the room where the table was laid. And when she was brought there she looked round, and

seeing nothing but three or four crusts of barley bread, and bran, set on the grass, she was greatly amazed. . . . So they ate together, giving thanks to God for all his gifts. And the Lady Poverty ordered cooked foods to be brought in dishes. And a dish was brought full of cold water, into which they all dipped their bread. For they had not a supply of dishes, nor more than one cook. And she asked at least to have a few sweet-smelling raw herbs brought to her; but as they had no gardener, and did not understand gardening, they gathered wild herbs in the wood and placed them before her. And she said: 'Bring a little salt, that I may salt the herbs, for they are bitter.' And they said: 'Wait a little while, lady, till we go into the city, and we will bring you some, if anyone offers us any.' And she said: 'I pray you to bring me a knife to cut off the parts I do not want, and to cut my bread, which is very hard and dry.' They said to her: 'Lady, we have no smith who could make swords for us; for the present you must use your teeth instead of a knife, and later we will provide you with one.' And she said: 'Is there perhaps a little wine to be had here?' And they replied: 'Our lady, we have no wine, for bread and water are the foundation of man's life, and it is not good for you to drink wine, for the bride of Christ ought to flee wine

like poison.' And when they were filled, rejoicing more in their want than if there had been abundance of everything, they led her to a place where she might rest, for she was tired. So she lay down on the bare ground. And she asked for a pillow for her head. And they straightway brought her a stone and put it under it. And after she had slept awhile most peacefully and temperately, she arose in haste, asking them to shew her their cloister. And leading her to a hill-top, they shewed her the whole world as far as they could see, saying : ' This is our cloister, lady.' "

One more example of the poverty of the Portiuncula settlement may be drawn from the *Speculum*,<sup>1</sup> an example which illustrates further the spiritual freedom of Francis' service, that which made his conduct so inexplicable, and therefore suspicious to the cold formalists who, having less of the spirit to offer in their sacrifice of devotion, were bound under the letter.

A poor old woman came one day to S. Mary of the Portiuncula, begging an alms from S. Francis. Inquiry proved that there was nothing in the house to give her, which meant, indeed, nothing to the Lesser Brothers, not nothing poor enough for so poor a creature. " For she needs," said the General Minister, of whom Francis had inquired,

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 38.

“such alms as will sustain her body. But in the church we have a single New Testament, in which we read the lessons at matins.” For at that time the brothers had no breviaries, and very few psalteries.

So S. Francis said to him : “Give the Testament to our mother, that she may sell it to supply her need. For I firmly believe that it will be more pleasing to God and the blessed Virgin than if we were to read in it.”

The writer of the *Sacrum Commercium* rightly emphasised one main aspect of Franciscan poverty—its joyfulness. It was no halidame that Francis had wedded in Lady Poverty, but a bride joyful and beautiful beyond all thought of those who read her grey and repellent, because they knew her not. The joyful purity of spirit which pervades the legend of his early life, finding constant expression in outpourings of broken French, or, when words failed, in inarticulate song, was not quelled or even much diverted from its natural course in his new conditions of life. It might almost be said that joy and poverty were the two essential qualifications of a Lesser Brother ; Francis seemed to set at least as much store by the first as by the second, recognising, no doubt, that without joy his poverty had lost its staying power. One day, after the brothers had made their home at the Portiuncula,

a poor man passed by on his way from the city where he had been to beg for alms ; and as he went along the road he burst out into songs of joy and praise to God.

“Now when he drew near to the church of blessed Mary, blessed Francis heard him, and he ran out to him at once with the greatest eagerness and joy, and meeting him in the way, he kissed his shoulder with great gladness, where he had carried his wallet with alms. And he took the wallet from his shoulder and put it on his own, and carried it thus into the house of the brothers, and in the presence of the brothers he said : ‘So I want my brother to go and come again with alms, elate and joyful, praising God.’”<sup>1</sup>

Far from finding merit in a gloomy countenance, Francis thought it almost disgraceful to a servant of God.<sup>2</sup> Regarding it as a discord in the harmonious beauty of God’s world to bear about among men the symbols of grief, he retired by himself into a solitary place, when he could not appear with his wonted cheerfulness. Once at the Portiuncula, he was afflicted for more than two years with depression, which compelled him constantly to withdraw from the company of the brothers ; till one day, while he was at prayer in the little church, his depression vanished like a

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 96.



cloud.<sup>1</sup> Leo ends the chapter with a pathetic confession of S. Francis to his companion : "If the brothers knew how often and how heavily the demons afflict me, there is not one of them but would be moved with compassion and pity towards me."

The healthful joy of demeanour which Francis desired in men, as the temples of God, may not unreasonably be connected with his practice of sweeping out God's peculiar sanctuary, the churches, and keeping them also clean and free from every grain of impurity. We hear of this custom in the early days of the Order, when few Brothers were living with him at S. Mary of the Portiuncula, and it was his wont to make the round of the villages and churches in the district of Assisi, preaching repentance to the people ; "and he carried with him a broom for sweeping dirty churches ; for it grieved blessed Francis sorely to see a church which was not clean as he desired."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 99.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 56. Several of the wayside churches, no doubt visited in this way by S. Francis, still remain ; for example, S. Vitale on the western slope of Monte Subasio, and S. Fortunato, with a quaint side-chapel, on a bleak ridge of hill about an hour's walk to the north of Assisi. The incident of the call of brother John, related in *Spec. Perf.*, 57, in connexion with one of these church-sweeping expeditions, probably took place in the village of Notiano on the north-east slopes of Subasio. (Cf. Sabatier's note to this passage.)

It has been impossible to choose more than a few incidents from the many which are necessarily associated with the Portiuncula as the continued home of S. Francis and gathering-place of all the brothers : they have naturally been those which help to impress and illustrate, directly or indirectly, the ideal of life and habitation conceived by S. Francis for his Order, since in the Portiuncula this ideal was to find its purest and most concentrated expression. But the eye-witness has here little advantage over the reader of history : it is perhaps easier imaginatively to reconstruct from written indications, the little settlement of poor men grouped round the chapel in the forest, than to realise it when confronted with the great ungainly building which has absorbed it.

Robbed of its glorious crown of forest trees, its one claim to natural beauty, and shut out by bricks and plaster from the sky and free air, the Portiuncula bears, indeed, little likeness to the settlement for whose preservation S. Francis pleaded so earnestly. His love for it far exceeded a man's love for his home, of which by association each stone becomes precious ; it was a love independent of custom, independent also of situation or any inherent beauty.

It was the predetermined function of the Portiuncula which bound S. Francis to it, and when he

pleaded for its preservation he was pleading for the idea itself, feeling, it would seem, that the pattern lost or modified, the work based on it would not proceed. With his belief in a picture rather than in an abstract injunction, Francis felt more confidence in this living reminder, which so long as the brothers assembled together would be always before them. He would be the first to realise that if his idea were vitally apprehended, it would find for itself the directest means for its embodiment ; but there were many among his followers who were copyists of parts without power of participating in the initial inspiration, and for them his pattern was essential. But this ideal function of the Portiuncula was only dimly recognised by most of his followers ; to them it was endeared by personal associations of supreme interest. It was here that S. Clare had been consecrated to God's peculiar service, escaping to the little chapel under cover of night, through the silent woods which then separated it from the city ; and it was to this scene of her initiation that many years later she came, by special license, to eat with S. Francis, on which occasion tradition tells that the inhabitants of Assisi, and of Bettona under the hills opposite Assisi, saw the Portiuncula as it were in flames, illumined by the radiance of those who dined within.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xv.

It was here, too, that S. Francis was brought to die by his own wish, when, lying ill in the bishop's palace at Assisi, he felt his weakness growing swiftly upon him.<sup>1</sup>

At the bishop's palace S. Francis, despite his weakness, used often to break out into song, and one day one of his companions<sup>2</sup> remonstrated with him on the impropriety of so much singing for a saint who was at the point of death, seeing that the noise of his own and the brothers' singing could be heard outside the palace. He suggested, therefore, that it would be well to return to S. Maria degli Angeli, where there would be no one to scandalise. Francis replied that he had obtained assurance from God of the forgiveness of his sins, and that as he had wept before, now he should continue to sing and praise the goodness of God. "As to our leaving here," he added, "I consent to it, and it pleases me, but you must find means of carrying me, for my infirmity will not allow me to walk." Then the Brothers took him in their arms and carried him thus, accompanied by many citizens. His eyesight was almost entirely gone, and he could no longer distinguish the city, but bade his companions turn him towards it that he might bless it.

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, i 24.

<sup>2</sup> From S. Francis' reference to the dream of this brother as to the date of his death we know that it was brother Elias.

This farewell took place when the little procession had reached a point midway between Assisi and the Portiuncula,<sup>1</sup> where was a little hospice, S. Salvator de Parietibus. It is now replaced by the Casa Gualdi on the main road from the city to the Portiuncula, exactly opposite the Via Francesca, which runs between it and S. Damiano. It was down the Via Francesca that the procession would pass, leaving the city by the Portaccia—the ancient market-gate close to the bishop's palace, but now blocked up—and descending the hill through the hamlet of Valecchia. From the Casa Gualdi the whole extent of the city would lie outspread before S. Francis, lacking in little that is there to-day save that where now stands the noble church and convent of S. Francesco, continuous with the city at its north-west end, stood then in its place the isolated barren hill known as the Collis Inferni, the common burial-ground of criminals.

Francis had only a few more days to live, and Leo is silent about these days. He records only the visit of Giacobba of Settesoli, bringing cloth for

<sup>1</sup> As Leo notes with his usual precision. The accuracy of his topographical indications in the neighbourhood of Assisi has been sufficiently noted by M. Sabatier. It is particularly remarkable at S. Maria degli Angeli, the place of all others most deeply graven in his memory (cf. *Spec. Perf.*, 4), “juxta cellam post domum in via”; 92, “quum ambularet solus non longe ab ecclesia S. Maria,” etc.

a tunic and some cakes for which her friend had a special liking. The notice of his death is brief but adequate. His spirit had been vigorous to the end, and would still live, and Leo rightly felt that few words were needed to record his passing.

"And when he had said this,<sup>1</sup> he was carried to S. Maria, where, having fulfilled xl years of age,<sup>2</sup> and xx years of perfect penitence in the year of the Lord MCCXXVII on the 19 October, he passed to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom he loved with his whole heart and soul and strength, with the most ardent love and the fullest affection, following him most perfectly, hastening after him most swiftly, and at last attaining to him most gloriously, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen."

The cell where S. Francis died, and the little plot of flowers for which he prayed place might always be found among the vegetables, are imprisoned now in the precincts of the great convent like separate petals of a flower, which, apart from the whole, and thus severally preserved, have lost their meaning, hue, and fragrance.

A post-Franciscan legend relating to the Portiuncula—the vision by Leo, of Bernard glorified—

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* pronounced the blessing on Assisi. The visit of Giacobbe is related in an earlier chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Francis died at the age of 45.

is worth recording ; it is almost Dantesque in its simple and beautiful significance.<sup>1</sup>

“Now at that time, brother Leo and brother Rufino lay sick at the place of the Portiuncula. And brother Leo, who was the more sick, had the following vision. For he saw a multitude of brothers moving along in procession ; and amongst them he saw one from whose eyes proceeded rays brighter than the sunrays, so that he could not look in his face on account of its exceeding brightness. And inquiring of one of the brothers whither they were going, he replied : ‘To receive the soul of a certain brother at the Portiuncula, who is sick and shortly to die.’ And he asked again : ‘Who was that brother from whose eyes such bright light proceeded?’ And he said : ‘Dost thou not know him ? It is brother Bernard of Quintavalle.’ ‘And wherefore,’ said he, ‘do his eyes sparkle with such brightness?’ And he said : ‘Because he used always to judge gently of the things that he saw in others.’”

The fitness of relation between this virtue and its spiritual reward must be apparent ; and the fitness of suggestion, by which the spirits of many brothers wait on the passing of one of their number from their earthly home—the Portiuncula.

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. fr.*, iii. p. 534.

THE CARCERI.—This small and picturesque convent still remains one of the most striking, as also one of the most familiar of those inhabited by S. Francis. Its origin is obscure ; it was built probably by the Benedictines of Monte Subasio, who used it as a retreat for solitary sojourn and meditation, an adjunct to their larger monastery of S. Benedetto. It was inhabited by them during the early years of Francis' life, and presented to him about 1216.

The convent of the Carceri is within easy reach of Assisi, distant about one and a half hours on foot, by a road which, starting from the Porta Capuccini, winds between the olive gardens in gradual ascent along the side of Monte Subasio. As it approaches the projection of the mountain which hides the Carceri from sight, the road increases in steepness, and becomes a rough track of large loose stones. The mountain too is here more barren of vegetation, but the path is fragrant with a rich border of sweetbriar. Looking back from this point, before pressing inwards to the wooded precincts of the convent, the city is seen in splendid isolation, defined against the wide sweep of undulating plain, and the distant uplands around Perugia. All the less ancient portion is hidden by the castle hill ; from this aspect, perhaps the only new feature since Francis' time is the graceful



campanile of S. Chiara : almost the whole extent of the town as he knew it is visible, including the cathedral buildings of S. Rufino and the towers of the ancient cathedral S. Maria Maggiore, and lower still, almost at the base of the mound, the quaint round roof and noble tower of S. Pietro ; to the extreme left, S. Damiano nestling in trees, and to the extreme right the ruined tower of the Little Rocca ; while the castle with its conspicuous girdle of green crowns the whole.

The Carceri was a dwelling-place peculiarly congenial to S. Francis as an individual, and as the founder of a community who were to use meditation as a means of greater fellowship through God with their kind, not as an estranging medium ; for it was, as we have seen, within easy reach of the city to which the Brothers were compelled frequently to resort by the rule which limited their alms to a day's supply of food. But though recommended to him by its proximity to the city, the Carceri was still more endeared by the natural beauty of its situation. The low-roofed, beehive-like buildings are imbedded in a deep, narrow gorge, clinging to the barren breast of Monte Subasio. From its perilous perch the little convent, like an eagle's eyrie, dominates the ravine, peering out on the plain through the dense wood of ilex and fresh leafage which enfolds it. The ravine is cleft by

the bed of a mountain torrent, now dry—through the act of S. Francis, tradition tells us. Natural hollows and caves in the rocky sides of the gorge served as cells in which the brothers used to meditate singly and undisturbed. These little rocky chambers are scattered through the convent woods, each connected with the memory of a particular brother by a rude cross of wood bearing his name. These are the true “carceri,” or caves, from which the convent has its name. In spring the ground is rich and fragrant with creeping plants and delicate flowers, cyclamen, and violets ; and the birds, who find scant hospitality elsewhere, have a peaceful shelter here. It is a retreat of absolute peace and refreshment. The wind, caught and imprisoned in his passage over the mountain, is the sole restless and disturbing inmate, yet one who could ill be spared ; for he is a cunning maker of tree-music and prodigal of memories, and the mute, mysterious blue expanse, half veiled and half revealed by the swinging branches, borrows an ocean voice from him.

Immediately within the gate of the convent is a tiled courtyard, with two stone walls and a little parapet overhanging the sheer precipice. From this, several doors lead into the convent now inhabited by the brothers, and through a door opposite the gate of entrance, surmounted by a small

pathetic figure of S. Francis, we pass into the ancient panelled choir and network of narrow passages and tortuous stairs, hewn in the solid rock and lighted by tiny windows, which lead to the rude stone bedroom and little oratory of S. Francis. From this little suite of rooms we pass out on to the bridge which spans the river-bed, and from which Francis is supposed to have expelled the devil by drying up the torrent whose form he had assumed. The whole of this nest of buildings is dwarf-like in its dimensions, and seems by right of fitness to belong to the rock-goblins rather than to human kind. Man can only creep in strange bent posture through the low doorways and tunnelled passages. It is impossible to picture a place less modified by masonry or more fascinating in its minuteness. The fellowship with brother mole and all the burrowing brotherhood seems almost realised.

S. Bernardino of Siena, the master-builder of Lo Speco of Monte Pancrazio, made additions to the Carceri in 1320, increasing its size by several cells and a kitchen. Miss Duff Gordon quotes an interesting description from an early author who was evidently not enamoured of its straitness.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately she does not give the name of her authority.

<sup>1</sup> *The Story of Assisi*, Miss Duff Gordon. Dent, Mediæval Cities. I use the author's translation.

“It were better called a grotto with six lairs ; one sees but the naked rock untouched by the chisel, all rough and full of holes as left by Nature ; those who see it for the first time are seized with extraordinary fear on climbing the ladder leading to the dormitory, at each end of which are other poor buildings, added by the religious according as need arose for the use of the friars, who do not care to live as hermits did in the olden times. The refectory is small and can contain but few friars. A brother guardian made an excavation of sufficient height and breadth in the rock, and added thereto a table, around which can sit other six religious, so that those who take their places at this new table are huddled up in the arched niche, which forms a baldaquin above their heads. There is also a little common room which horrifies all beholders, wherein is lit a fire, for besides being far inside the rocky mass, it is gloomy beyond description by reason of the dense smoke always enclosed therein. This is a lively cause to the religious of reflexion on the hideousness and obscurity of the darkness of hell ; in lieu of receiving comfort from the fire, the poor friars generally come out with tears in their eyes.”

The name of brother Rufino, one of the collaborators of Leo in the Legend of the Three Companions, is chiefly associated with the Carceri. We

gather from various indications concerning him, and chiefly from his life in the *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals*, that his chief temptation was to that barren contemplation which Francis most deprecated in his followers. "Now brother Rufino, through continued contemplation, had become so absorbed in God, that he was grown almost insensible and scarcely ever spoke, and then so haltingly, that he seemed to utter his words morosely and almost violently." This indication of his propensities seems to give some ground to Francis' injunction that he should preach naked in the cathedral of S. Rufino.<sup>1</sup>

Conrad of Offida relates a not unnatural delusion to which Rufino fell a prey during a Lent passed by the brothers in the Carceri. They were scattered about in the caves and in cells made from the branches of trees, when it was suggested to Rufino that he might well find a safer guide than brother Francis, "*idiotam et simplicem*, who often distracted the brothers from their devotions by sending them hither and thither to leper hospitals; but this would be a safe way of life, to copy the life of S. Anthony and other anchorites, and to abide in desert places alone." Rufino's purpose was finally shaken by the devil in the form of a beautiful shining angel. He no longer joined Francis and

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xxx.

the other brothers for the customary meal, but, contrary to the rule, begged a week's supply of food at Assisi, and carrying it to his cell remained there in undisturbed solitude.

“Now blessed Francis and the brothers thought that he wished to live apart from the others during Lent for the sake of solitude, because he was a man much given to prayer; but on the day of the Lord's Feast blessed Francis sent for all the brothers who were living alone in the mountain, that together they might celebrate the Lord's Feast, and afterwards take their communion together. But brother Rufino replied to the brother who summoned him: ‘Tell brother Francis that I will not come, nor follow him from henceforth, but I intend to live here alone, for it is easier to be saved thus than to follow his simple way, even as the Lord revealed to me.’ When blessed Francis heard this, moved with sorrow he sent another messenger to him to urge him to come.” But with the same result. After communion Francis went himself to seek an explanation of this strange insurgency, only too ready, one may believe, to think that the fault lay in his own unworthiness. At first Rufino made the same reply, complaining of the constant distractions which obedience to the rule involved. Francis reasoned with him tenderly and patiently, and at last invoked the tempting

spirit in his true form, and expelled him on the threshold of the convent.

Rufino had another encounter with the devil at the Carceri, which also took the form of distrust of the qualifications of Francis as a leader.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the serene Johannes Agricola, Rufino was convinced that his part was amongst the damned, as also that of Francis himself and all who followed him. To give potency to the temptation the devil took the form of the crucified Christ. It was long before Rufino could bring himself to speak of his trouble to S. Francis ; but the latter was swift to guess it, and sent Masseo to fetch him. "To whom brother Rufino replied reproachfully : 'What have I to do with brother Francis?' Then brother Masseo, filled full of divine wisdom, and recognising the deception of the devil, said : 'O, brother Rufino, do you not know that brother Francis is like an angel of God, who has illumined countless souls in the world, and from whom we have received the grace of God? Therefore I desire that you come to him with me at once, for I see clearly that you are deceived by the devil.' And when he had said this, brother Rufino rose and went to S. Francis. And seeing him come from afar, S. Francis began to call : 'O, my bad little brother Rufino, whom have you been believing?'" Francis was not long

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xxix.

in convincing Rufino of the fallacy to which he had given way, and added a further test of real philosophic value. "By this also you should have known that it was the devil, in that he hardened your heart to all good, which thing is proper to his office ; but blessed Christ never hardens the heart of the faithful man, but rather softens it, according as he says by the mouth of the prophet : 'I will take away your heart of stone, and give you a heart of flesh.'"

After receiving his master's consolation and blessing Rufino returned to his cell in the wood. "And as he stood praying with many tears, lo, the enemy came to him again, in the person of Christ to outward appearance, and said to him : 'O, brother Rufino, did I not tell you not to believe the son of Peter Bernardone, and not to tire yourself with weeping and praying, since you are damned ? What good does it do you to afflict yourself while you are alive, when after your death you will be damned ?' And brother Rufino straightway replied to the devil : 'Open your mouth, that I may throw dung into it' ; whereat the devil in great wrath forthwith departed, with so violent a tempest and upheaval of the rocks of Monte Subasio, which was close beside them, that the tumult of the rocks as they fell lasted a great while ; and they clashed together with such violence as they came rolling



down that they flashed fearful sparks of fire through the valley ; and at the terrible noise they made, S. Francis and his companions came out of the place in great wonder to see what new thing this was ; and that mighty ruin of rocks is still to be seen."

The Carceri passed through various vicissitudes in the centuries following the death of S. Francis.<sup>1</sup> The Fraticelli took possession of the convent in the early fourteenth century, but they were chased from it in 1340, during the celebration of a Chapter at Assisi. It next sheltered Gentile, a schismatic layman of Spoleto, and his followers, who were finally expelled in 1355, when, as Papini says, "their iniquity was revealed," and the convent was then the scene of more orthodox sanctity than it had enjoyed for many years ; for it gave shelter to blessed Valentini of Narni, whose holiness and miracles restored it to good repute.

It is perhaps owing only to the remoteness of its

<sup>1</sup> During the last years of his life, the Carceri sheltered Andrew of Spello, a member of the noble family of Caccioli, who received the habit in 1223, when the death of his mother and sister set him free from secular ties. He was present at the death of S. Francis, and was famed for his holiness and his power of intercession, and the coming of rain, after prayer of his, won for him the name of "S. Andrew of the Waters." He founded the first convent at Spello, and maintained in it the observance of the First Rule, in zealous opposition to the innovations of Elias.

situation in the wooded mountain hollow, and to its inconspicuous structure, that the Carceri escaped destruction at the hands of the contending Guelphs and Ghibellines, while San Benedetto, the Benedictine stronghold of Monte Subasio, set boldly on its central slope, a noble and imposing pile, was left in ruins. Of the grand old convent, the home of Francis' patrons, nothing now remains save a few rooms which peasants inhabit, some fragments of ancient ivy-covered wall, and the beautiful crypt, its floor strewn with litter of stone and plaster. The humble group of buildings may still be seen clinging against the mountain side, conspicuous from the city by the bright green of its terraced garden.

THE CARCERELLE.—This little hermitage, which until lately remained in an entirely deserted and ruined condition, dates from the thirteenth century. Its flourishing time was short. It was built as a shelter for the followers of the Strict Observance, who were soon driven from the Carceri, and when, not long afterwards, it was partially demolished, the Fraticelli found a temporary shelter among its ruins. No peculiar associations of sanctity attach to it, but it is one of the most delightfully situated, as also one of the most characteristic of the homes of the primitive Franciscan community.

The Franciscan historian, Lipsin, records erroneously that it belonged to the Cappuccini, and that Joseph of Leonissa passed the year of his novitiate here, and worked many wonders.

"This ancient convent is commonly called the Carcerelle—that is to say, the Little Carceri, to distinguish it from the other sanctuary which in the tongue of the country is named the Carceri." In Lipsin's time it does not seem to have been wholly deserted. "A few hermits always dwell there, whose care it is to tend it diligently and to keep the church clean and consecrate. Sometimes in spring or autumn the illustrious canons go in a body to seek recreation and refreshment of mind in that charming and health-giving spot, making up a sociable and friendly party; and the bishop himself does not scorn to join them." Lipsin's terms of commendation are wisely vague. It is difficult to believe that he ever entrusted himself to the steep and stony path<sup>1</sup> leading from the Carceri road to the Carcerelle, or, indeed, that the illustrious Chapter would be satisfied with the very narrow accommodation they would find there.

<sup>1</sup> This path strikes up the face of the mountain about two-thirds of the way along the road between Assisi and the Carceri, at the point where a cottage is situated, slightly below the level of the road. A few minutes' climb brings one to a disused quarry, beyond which, at a stone's throw, are the buildings of the little hermitage.

The Carcerelle is so securely stowed away in the upper folds of Monte Subasio, that it entirely eludes observation from the road which passes at no great distance below. The mountain around it is sparsely wooded with oaks, prickly shrubs, and the Judas-tree, and great boulders of dislodged rock lie close above the path. The situation is one of great beauty. From the field beyond the hermitage the city is seen to the right, as if nestling in the hollow of the castle-hill, and far below the olives, on a windy day, surge in grey, silver-crested waves against the mountain, their rich mossy stems outlined in sober profile against the emerald background of waving corn. Far away to left and right stretches the wide Spoleto valley, through which in the rare seasons when the Tescio is a river,<sup>1</sup> a thin stream of silver may be seen straying, half-stranger, through its broad, stony bed.

The ruined buildings of the Carcerelle are still recognisable as an ancient hermitage, but desolate and neglected, though some attempt has lately been made to clear away the accumulated dirt and rubbish which made the buildings almost repulsive. A few fragments of rude, half-obliterated fresco are

<sup>1</sup> For the greater part of the year the bed of the Tescio is a great waterless track, from which the dry summer winds catch up the sand and fling it abroad in wreaths of dust.

still to be seen on the walls. But the chief treasure of the Carcerelle is found across the ploughed field which lies in front of the hermitage. Standing back, close under the mountain rock, among the sparse ruins of ancient buildings, is a well with a simple stone parapet. A tiny trough, which till lately hung above it, no doubt served as a receptacle for holy water. The well is not deep: round at the top, it opens out below into a spacious square cavern, its base lined with loose stones partly covered with water. Keep silence about it and you will not learn its secret, but breathe a sound, however slight, and you are no longer alone. From the hollows below, mocking voices chide and deride you, flinging back your laughter or your sighs with strange perversions of goblin mirth or spite. There is a mysterious presage in this subterranean echo, which is unknown to echoes of the upper air; to the genius of the cavern belongs a wider scale of melody, and the gnomes swell the echo from their far recesses till the harmony falls flat and tuneless in the bowels of the mountain. It is not strange that demons should have taken part in the midnight vigils of the Brothers, or that unearthly voices should have mingled with their prayers. Such an echo as that of the Carcerelle would people the solitudes with companions which their imaginations might

well refuse to read as the personification of natural forces.

MONTE SUBASIO.—No record is kept of Francis' wanderings on the mountain top, save by the shepherds who treasure his memory in their Fifth Gospel, the Gospel of S. Francis. Yet one to whom solitude and wide spaces were so precious must have been familiar with the upper slopes of Subasio, no less than with the lower wooded glades, which are associated with some of his early meditations. In the green, flowery hollows above the Carceri, whence Assisi is seen folded far below, a dark cluster round the hillside, where a solitary lark alone breaks the silence in cover of a creeping bush; and higher still on the broad mountain summit, where forget-me-not of deepest blue grows in the shallow soil round the bare, pink stone, or in more sheltered spaces, narcissus waves above the tall wild grass, no limit is set to the mind's free wanderings. All lassitude seems to fall from body and spirit, and the mind is clear from mists and doubts and personal desire in the sweeping space which gathers it in, and the free mountain air passing across the snow-clad range to the east, flows through the body, supplying new life and energy and food.

Before Monte Subasio all Umbria lies outspread.



BULLOCK-WAGGON

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Far in the east rise the faint, snowy forms of the Sibillines, which, with the Apennines, form its twofold division from the Marches ; to the north, Gubbio lies grey and faint along the slopes of Monte Cucco ; far to the north-west can be seen the wooded summit of La Verna, a strange, dark mass on the faint mountain horizon ; westwards, Lake Trasimeno gleams among the mountains, and across the intervening line of hills to the south-west a glistening sunray may reveal Todi, above the Tiber valley.

Closer at hand, to the north-east, Nocera lies against the Apennines, above the Topino valley, and deep among the mountains, midway between it and Camerino, is buried the hermitage of Saphro, where brother Bernard lay hidden from Elias in the early troubled days following the death of Francis. Immediately above Nocera is the convent of Bagnara, where Francis stayed on his last journey to Assisi.

It is possible to trace their journey from this point, down a tributary of the Topino, and over the last short southern spur of Monte Subasio, till they came down by Spello. They would pass on their way the village where the simple disciple John left his bulls and joined Francis,<sup>1</sup> and Vallegloria, the Convent of Poor Sisters, whither Francis and Clare

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 57.

were journeying when the miracle of the rose-bush at Spello set God's seal on their relationship.

Often, when the evening shadows were folding its green hollows, Francis must have climbed to the peaceful solitude of the great mountain and sent out his spirit over the wide domain through which he was to bear the love which had burned into his own soul ; and later, when his feet had trodden the mountains bounding that region, he must have watched them creep out through the shadows like familiar faces, seen with fresh awe and reverence in the new, strange evening light. They respond to the touch of moonlight rather than of day. It calls music from them which the sun never hears after the first veil of early dawn has been drawn back.

SANT' ANGELO IN PANSO.—Midway between the road to the Carceri and the Spello road, among the many paths which intersect the mountain side between the olive gardens, is still to be seen the house, known as S. Angelo in Panso, which sheltered S. Clare and her sister Agnes soon after their flight from home. According to Padre Angeli of Rivo Torto, the building was formerly a palace inhabited by two brothers of German race. Their disputes respecting the division of their temporal goods one day reached the point of open assault. Before they

had closed in fight an angel of God effected a reconciliation, and the brothers, warmly embracing, lived thereafter in mutual love, or at least in outward concord. In pious memory of the event, they converted the palace into a convent, which they gave to the Benedictine nuns, and built a chapel in the lower court, which they called *Cappella Sancti Angeli Pacis*, later corrupted into S. Angeli Pansii, or S. Angelo in Panso.

Padre Angeli continues: "The church and altar still are used, though the oratory is very simple: on the wall is seen a very ancient picture representing the aforesaid miracle, the angel standing, and the young men armed kneeling at his feet and kissing each other." In Padre Angeli's time it was still inhabited by a few secular sisters of the third Order, who gave hospitality to pilgrim sisters. The buildings, now converted into a farm, still bear undoubted marks of their more lordly origin. An imposing gateway leads into the courtyard, which is enclosed on three sides by a stone wall of some importance, and the path beside it is bordered by a stately avenue of walnut trees. The chapel, now used as a stable and fodder-house, is small and of no architectural interest; but there are discernible under the rough and damaged coat of plaster traces of fresco on another layer, also partly destroyed, perhaps commemorating

the event recounted by Padre Angeli. The inhabitants are as usual friendly and hospitable, with an air of well-being unusual in these parts.

It was to this convent, inhabited in S. Francis' time by the Benedictine nuns, that he conveyed S. Clare before her establishment at S. Damiano, and it was here that took place the attempted rape of her sister Agnes, who had joined her, by their enraged relations and some armed men from Sasso Rosso.<sup>1</sup>

The account of the young girl's determined resistance to the entreaties and threats of her pursuers, who, we are told, addressed themselves to Agnes alone, "for by this time they despaired of Clare," is moving in its simple directness; the courage and newly-won independence of the two girls, in the strength of a mutual love and of a love outside their separate selves—a spiritual force which could successfully oppose physical violence—has ennobled the associations of the spot.

SAN PIETRO DI BOVARA.—On the slopes of Monte Maggiore,<sup>2</sup> which continues the *massif* of Subasio, is the place furthest south of all the "loca" round

<sup>1</sup> The scene is related at length in the *Vita S. Clarae* in the *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals*.

<sup>2</sup> To be distinguished from Monte Maggiore which forms the northern boundary of the Terni valley. See chap. v.

Assisi authentically connected with S. Francis. Trevi is conspicuous on the mountain side from any high point in Assisi, and scarcely a quarter of a mile beyond it, half-hidden among the oak woods which still cover these lower slopes, is the church of S. Pietro di Bovara. It is evidently of very great age, and far more massive and stately in structure than the humble wayside chapels with which one is accustomed to connect the devotions of S. Francis. S. Pietro di Bovara is lofty and well-proportioned, and the pillars, though of square build and rudely sculptured, are noble and impressive.

We do not know whether in Francis' time there was any building attached to this church: from the importance of its structure, we may surmise that it belonged formerly to one of the many Benedictine foundations on these mountain slopes. From the *Speculum Perfectionis* we learn that when Francis went there it was ruined and deserted, also that it was in the neighbourhood of a leper hospital.<sup>1</sup>

It was here that he passed a solitary night in prayer, bidding his companion, brother Peaceful, the poet, return to the leper hospital and come for him early in the morning. Then follows the poet's

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 59, 60. As usual, the exact position is indicated.

vision of the thrones, recorded by Giotto in the Upper Church series of his *Life of S. Francis*: "When morning had come, brother Peaceful returned to him. Blessed Francis was standing in prayer before the altar. And brother Peaceful waited for him outside the choir, praying likewise before a crucifix. And he had no sooner begun to pray than he was caught up into heaven . . . and saw many seats in heaven, among which he saw one more exalted than the others and more glorious than them all, shining and adorned with many precious stones. And amazed at its beauty, he began to wonder within himself whose this seat might be. And straightway he heard a voice saying to him: 'This was the seat of Lucifer, and in his place humble Francis shall sit in it.'

"Just as he had come to himself, blessed Francis went out to him,<sup>1</sup> and that brother at once fell at his feet with his arms outspread in the form of a cross, and gazing upon him as if he were already in heaven sitting on that seat, he said to him: 'Father, hear my prayer, and pray the Lord that he have pity on me, and forgive me my sins and pardon me.' And stretching out his hand, blessed Francis raised him, and straightway he knew that he had seen something in a vision. For he seemed quite changed, and spoke to blessed Francis not as

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* from the sanctuary to the nave.

if he were living in the flesh, but as if he were reigning in heaven.

“And later, because he did not like to tell S. Francis his vision, he began to speak to him as if at a distance, and amongst other things he said to him : ‘What is your opinion of yourself, brother?’ Blessed Francis answered and said to him : ‘It seems to me that I am a greater sinner than any in the whole world.’ And straightway it was spoken to the soul of brother Peaceful : ‘Hereby you may know that the vision you saw was true, for whereas Lucifer was thrown from that seat through pride, so Francis shall merit through his humility to be raised to it and to sit in it.’”

Less than two miles beyond S. Pietro is a beautiful little Roman temple by the roadside, above the source of the Clitumnus, a deep, swift stream of exquisite purity and clearness, flowing silently among the tall rushes through peaceful meadows.

SASSO ROSSO.—The walk to Sasso Rosso, where once stood the castle in which S. Clare passed her childhood, is in spring one of the most beautiful round Assisi. The old Spello road, which turns up to the left a few minutes after leaving the Porta Nuova, winds along the mountain side among olive gardens and orchards and fragrant bean fields. The spring, which is the youth of all herbs and green

leafage, is the autumn and old age of the olives. The hoary leaves shake out their silver, half-crumpled, to the sun, awaiting their dismissal ; a warmer age is upon the gnarled trunks, luxuriant in deep, rich garment of lichen and bedded moss, while the fresh green of the young corn breaks in waves round their feet, with here and there a scarlet poppy-gem, or a sprinkling of crimson clover-spikes.

Crossing the broad dry bed of the Carceri torrent the road continues to wind, still gradually rising, upon the half-barren mountain side. Here and there a nightingale breaks into fitful thrills of song, and a cuckoo is heard from the wooded ravine and rich, rocky undergrowth which separates S. Benedetto from the Sasso Rosso. Soon the road begins to mount steeply, and a sharp turning to the left leads up through ilex and young oaks to the base of the rock.

The ancient home of the Scifi family has now entirely disappeared from its lofty perch on the projecting rock from which it took its name. A careful search on the upper crags of the rock, the sides of which are clothed in richly coloured shrubs and dark ilex, and fragrant with hardy rock-plants, will detect the marks of human masonry in an occasional layer of hewn stone, but no bounds are set to conjecture in the reconstruction of the ancient fortress. The massive rock descending



sheer to the side of Monte Subasio must have formed a natural wall absolutely impregnable to assault. It is a wildly romantic spot, at the juncture of the south and west flanks of Monte Subasio, and commanding from its upper crags an extensive view of the entire Spoleto valley, the horizon bounded by mountains on every side. No sky seems lost among these mountains ; they do not crowd upon the mind and overwhelm it by stress of their might. They leave wide spaces of cloud and heaven for habitation ; they do not seek to dominate the sky, but reach up to it as lovers. Immediately below the Sasso Rosso, the old Spello road winds on to Gabbiano and Satriano, in which last tiny hamlet took place the only recorded incident of S. Francis' last journey from Nocera to Assisi.<sup>1</sup>

Soldiers had been sent from Assisi to fetch him back in haste to the city, lest perchance it should be robbed of the privilege of a saintly death. They bore him by the least direct route to avoid possible envoys from Perugia, whose people were also anxious to acquire the body of the saint. When the party reached Satriano several of the number went in search of food, but their money could purchase none. Then S. Francis bade them ask for it "per amore di Dio," his most potent appeal ;

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 22.

and the inhabitants, who were unmoved by the offer of money, were responsive to the less tangible pledge.

The route which has been suggested as the most direct and picturesque to Sasso Rosso, is that which the sad little procession followed, bearing home their beloved master, whom death could not overcome till he had found rest in the place of all others most fraught for him with significant memories, and most dear to him as the fatherland of the community which was the symbol and expression of his idea. A peculiar pathos attaches to this last journey of S. Francis. The long strain which he had put upon his body by excessive abnegation and by stress of emotion had at last worn out his always delicate and nervous frame beyond reparation by his determined will. He was called on to bear not lassitude only, but terrible physical pain, and to this was added heavy and constant anxiety for the future of his Order. The devotion of his untiring companion, brother Leo, could not altogether dispel the heaviness of spirit which his fears for the future forced upon him. Winding through the olive gardens and forest trees which then clothed the mountain, his gaze would rest on Assisi long before the procession reached the gates, and on the spot of forest which encircled the Portiuncula in the plain below ; and

we can imagine how the diverse phases of his life would crowd upon him—seemingly opposed, yet deeply unified—and all intimately connected with these mountain slopes and with the very path along which they were bearing him home. Those who know Assisi only “when light rides high and the dew is gone,” do not know the city in which her mystic son delighted, and which, when death first laid an unwavering hand upon him, drew him back from the most lovely of Italy’s solitudes, with the strong chain of a deeply human passion. Twilight is short, but marvellously sweet in light and fragrance, sweeter even than the young breath of dawn; for the evening twilight is still warm with the day, but beckons to a cool repose; the dawn is the folding-star of shadows and of the phantom mists. Francis and his companions must often have followed the winding road from Spello below the sleeping mountain, journeying home, their faces set towards the warm afterglow behind the sharp outline of the Perugia hills. It is in this creeping twilight and in the great darkness following, when the fireflies, dancing in strange elusive figures, flash like wayward lights about the path, that Assisi throws her spell most irresistibly over the soul.

## DISTRICT OF LAKE THRASYMENE

THE decision to treat the Franciscan dwellings on the borders of Umbria and Tuscany as members of a single district, with Lake Trasymene for its centre, is not altogether arbitrary. By comparing the relative positions of Perugia, Chiusi, and Cortona, which are the three chief centres of Franciscan energy in this district, they will be seen to form a triangle, in the midst of which Lake Trasymene makes a watery rent. But the lake itself is a Franciscan, as well as a geographical centre, for the Isola Maggiore, which lies near its north-west shore, was the scene of a Lenten fast kept by S. Francis in solitude.<sup>1</sup> In his time the island was wild and unpeopled, but a large convent, built in memory of his sojourn, is now conspicuous among the woods which cover it.

Francis was lodging on the night of Shrove Tuesday in the house of a faithful follower who lived by the lake, and inspired perhaps by the mysterious beauty of the island lying in the calm waters towards the sunset, he felt a great longing to go over and keep his fast there alone; so he

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, chap. vii.

prayed his friend to carry him over to the uninhabited island on the night of Ash Wednesday, so that no one should have knowledge of his going, taking nothing with him but two rolls.

“And when they were come to this island, and the friend was taking leave to return home, S. Francis affectionately prayed him not to tell anyone that he was there, and not to come for him till Holy Thursday : and so the man departed. And S. Francis remained alone.

“And as there was no dwelling to which he might withdraw, he entered a dense thicket where many plum-trees and bushes had formed a kind of den or little hut ; and in this place he betook himself to prayer and contemplation of heavenly things. And there he stayed all that Lent without eating or drinking anything, save one of the rolls, as his faithful follower found when he came back to him on Holy Thursday ; for he found one roll whole and half of the other. It is thought that S. Francis ate out of reverence for the fast of blessed Christ, who fasted forty days and forty nights without touching any material food ; and so, with that bit of bread, he chased from him the venom of vain glory, and by Christ’s example fasted forty days and forty nights ; and later, in the place where S. Francis had made such marvellous abstinence, God did many miracles by his

merits, for which reason men began to build houses there and dwell there ; and in a short while a good big village was made there, and a place of the brothers, which is called the place of the island, and the men and women of that village still hold in great reverence and devotion the place where S. Francis kept that fast."

Another unifying point may be found for this district in the personality of brother Giles.<sup>1</sup> Perugia, Agello, and Cetona are particularly associated with his memory, and the tract of country extending between them must often have been traversed by him in response to the summons of a superior. The noble expanse of Lake Trasymene, and the green islands set like gems within it, its flat, reed-fringed shore and the wooded and fortified heights rising round it, must have been a familiar landscape to him, both when the lake lay like a calm strip of blue sky in the midst of the land, and when it was stirred on a day of storm into grim and restless motion.

Francis took special delight in brother Giles, whose zeal in the service of poverty equalled his own, and whose joyful fulfilment of the labour-clause of the rule was remarkable for its untiring and fruitful invention of method. He was famous

<sup>1</sup> The "frère Egide" of M. Sabatier. *Vie de Saint François d'Assisi*.



ASCENT TO MONTE RIPIDO

(LOOKING BACK ON PERUGIA)

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among the brothers for the sprightliness and ingenuity of his wit, and his swift recognition and unmasking of hypocrisy and pretence.<sup>1</sup> His wisdom and sanctity were famed outside the Order as well as within, and his cell on Monte Ripido was visited by scholars who came from far to tempt him to show his skill in the dialectics of theology.

MONTE RIPIDO.—Monte Ripido, as seen from Assisi, stands in apparent isolation from the city of Perugia, surmounted by a cypress grove. This view represents better its real relation to the city in the time of Francis, than the view we have in approaching it from Perugia, for the northern portion of the city, now extending far beyond the ancient walls and forming a continuous link with the convent hill, is hidden in the distant view by the shoulder of Monte Ripido itself.

The convent is now reached in a few minutes from the seventeenth-century Porta Sant Angelo. When this gate is passed, the steep hill on which the cell and garden of brother Giles were situated, rises almost immediately before us. The large

<sup>1</sup> Compare his instructions to a Brother who came to him expressing his desire to preach on the piazza of Perugia. Brother Giles told him to say in his sermon : *Bo, bo, molto dico e poco fo !* (I talk a lot and do little.)

convent which now encloses them was given to the brothers by Jacobus Coppoli in 1276, nearly twenty years after the death of Giles. It is reached by a steep, tiled way, overgrown with daisies, and the convent gate leads into a courtyard, brilliantly carpeted with golden moss and mould. Further, except into the chapel, no woman is allowed entrance; but from a window in the guest-room something may still be seen of the view Giles had from the cell and little garden, to which he came for solitude and recreation after his retirement from active service.

A silk-mill now marks the site of the convent which was the fixed dwelling of the brothers at this time, and in which the meeting with Saint Louis of France and with brother Gerard took place. It is in a less commanding position than the present convent, on the lower western slopes of Monte Ripido.

Giles had well chosen the place for his own cell. The north-west slopes of Perugia form its immediate background, and the picturesque round church of Sant Angelo, formerly a Pagan temple, slightly to the left of the Porta Sant Angelo, marks the east limit of the city; beyond it, far below, stretches the wide Spoleto valley, with Assisi, as in further foreground, on the slopes of Subasio. Along the Assisi road, amongst a group of cypresses on a hill

close beside the Porta San Giovanni, is seen the hamlet of Colle, where, in Francis' time, a leper hospital existed. We know that he halted there on at least one occasion of a visit to Perugia, after his interview with the pope, in which the Indulgence of the Portiuncula was granted ; it was there that he woke Masseo from sleep to tell him the glad news that the Indulgence granted by the pope had been confirmed in heaven.

It was at Colle<sup>1</sup> that S. Francis met a poor man who could not bring himself to cease cursing his master till he should have restored to him some of the goods of which he had unjustly deprived him. The poor man was too heated to listen to Francis' prayer : "Brother, pardon your lord, for the love of God, that you may free your soul, and it is possible that he will even yet restore to you what has been taken away : otherwise, you have both lost your things and you will lose your own soul." But when he could not yield, S. Francis, profoundly convinced that "the mouth which belbeth destroyeth the soul," felt a compromise to be justifiable if it would convert this soul-destroying hatred into a more just and peaceful state of mind, and offered his own cloak as a substitute for the restitution due from the man's master. The act was well-judged. "Straight-

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 32.

way his heart was softened, and, prompted by the gift, he forgave his lord his injuries."

It was along this same Assisi road that S. Francis held his famous dialogue with Leo on the Perfect Joy, when they were taking their way home to the Portiuncula through the piercing cold of a winter's day.<sup>1</sup> M. Sabatier has truly characterised this chapter of sublime paradox as "the sum and flower of the Umbrian Gospel."<sup>2</sup>

"Once when S. Francis was coming from Perugia to Santa Maria degli Angeli with brother Leo, in the winter, and cold tortured him cruelly, he called brother Leo, who was walking in front of him, and spoke thus: 'Brother Leo, even though the Lesser Brothers in every land were to set a great example of holiness and improvement, nevertheless write and note diligently that there is not in this perfect joy.' And S. Francis, going further, called him a second time: 'O brother Leo, though the Lesser Brother should give light to the blind, and straighten those who are crippled, and drive out demons, and should make the deaf to hear and the lame to walk, and the dumb to speak, and, what is a greater matter, should raise the four days' dead, write that there is not in this perfect joy.' And going on a little he called loudly: 'O brother Leo, if the Lesser Brother were to know all

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, chap. viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, page xlii.

tongues and all sciences and all writings, so that he knew how to prophesy and reveal not only future things, but even the secrets of consciences and souls, write that not in this is perfect joy.' Going a little further, S. Francis called still loudly : 'O brother Leo, God's lamb, even if the Lesser Brother were to speak with the tongue of angels, and he knew the courses of the stars and the virtues of herbs ; and if there were revealed to him all the treasures of the earth, and he were to know the properties of birds, and of fishes and of all animals, and of men, and of trees and stones, and roots and waters, write that there is not in this perfect joy.' And going on a little way, S. Francis called loudly : 'O brother Leo, even if the Lesser Brother were able to preach so well that he could convert all infidels to the faith of Christ, write that this is not perfect joy.' And when this manner of speech had lasted for nearly two miles, brother Leo, with great amazement, asked him, saying : 'Father, I pray you, for God's sake, tell me where is perfect joy.' And S. Francis answered him : 'When we get to Santa Maria degli Angeli, drenched thus with rain and frozen with the cold, and covered with mud, and afflicted with hunger, and knock at the door of the place, and the porter comes angrily and says, Who are you ? and we say, We are two of your brothers ;

and he says, Ye speak false, for the truth is, you are two rogues, who go about deceiving the world and robbing the poor of their alms—go away ; and he will not open to us, but makes us stand outside in the snow and wet with our cold and our hunger till night ; if then we patiently bear such insults and cruelty and abuse without being provoked or murmuring against him, and if we think humbly and lovingly that the porter truly knows us, that God makes him speak against us, O brother Leo, write that here is perfect joy. And if we persevere in our knocking, and he comes out in a rage and drives us away like importunate beggars, with insults and blows, saying, Get hence, you wretched pilferers ; go to the hospital, for here you shall neither eat nor lodge ; if we bear this patiently and joyfully and lovingly, write, O brother Leo, that here is perfect joy. And if constrained by hunger and cold, and night coming on, we continue to knock and call and pray him with many tears for the love of God to open to us and take us in ; and he, more enraged than ever, says : Those fellows are troublesome rogues, I will give them their deserts ; and if he comes out with a knotted stick, and takes hold of us by the hood, and throws us on the ground, and rolls us in the snow, and beats us knot by knot with his stick ; if we bear all these things patiently and joyfully, thinking of the pains

of blessed Christ, which we must bear for love of him, write, O brother Leo, that here and in this is perfect joy ; and further, hear the conclusion, brother Leo.

“ Above all blessings and gifts of the Holy Spirit which Christ grants to his friends is the conquest of one’s self, and gladly to suffer pains and insults and shame and want : for in all the other gifts of God we cannot glory, for they are not ours, but God’s ; wherefore the apostle says : ‘ What hast thou that thou hast not from God ? ’ And if thou hast received it from him, why dost thou glory in it as if thou hadst it of thyself ? But in the cross of tribulation and of affliction we may glory because this is ours, and therefore the apostle says : ‘ I will not glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. ’ ”

It is easy to believe that his cell on the hill-top was particularly dear to brother Giles. On a clear day, when the early mists had floated from the valley, he would seem still in close touch with the city which had been the focus of his life’s work, and the home of his master : the scene, too, of his acceptance into the following of S. Francis. It was from this hill that he must have watched, with growing sorrow, the rearing of the mighty fabric on the Collis Paradisi, whose completion seemed to the closest adherents of S. Francis to threaten

the foundations of his Order. It was here that Leo came to take counsel with Giles as to the destruction of the shell put for offerings by Elias at the door of San Francesco ; and Giles would watch him toiling back sad at heart, but resolved on the act which would compromise his liberty and perhaps his life.

The meeting between Saint Louis and Giles, recounted in the *Fioretti*,<sup>1</sup> and commemorated by Fra Angelico in one of the finest and most moving of all his frescoes,<sup>2</sup> took place in the convent lower on the hill.

The story of this spiritual encounter is related in the *Fioretti* and by Angelico, with a reverent insight and reserve, which make it not only among the most precious of the Franciscan annals, but also one of the most perfect expressions in literature or art, of the silent union of souls. A false or jarring note, a trace of exaggeration or overemphasis, would have soiled its purity ; but both narrator and artist are worthy of their theme.

The pained remonstrance of the brothers, in their disappointment that Giles, instead of doing credit to his reputation, had neglected this opportunity of kingly converse, is not overdrawn. In

<sup>1</sup> Chapter xxxiv. Cf. also *Actus beati Francisci et Sociorum ejus*, chapter xlv.

<sup>2</sup> In the cloister of his own convent of San Marco.



the painting, the coarse emotions of these aggrieved onlookers, if dramatically realised, might easily have become intrusively apparent, and Angelico wisely limits his treatment to the central theme : but in the tale, though realistically, this breath from the world is so subtly introduced that it in no sense mars the serene and rare atmosphere in which the chief actors move.

“Saint Louis, King of France, went on pilgrimage to visit the sanctuaries throughout the world ; and hearing the exceeding fame of the holiness of brother Giles, who had been among the first companions of S. Francis, he made up his mind at all costs to visit him personally : wherefore he came to Perugia, where the said brother Giles was then living. And when he had come to the gate of the place of the brothers as a poor, unknown pilgrim with few companions, he asked very earnestly for brother Giles, saying nothing to the porter as to who it was who asked. So the porter goes to brother Giles and says : ‘ There is a pilgrim at the gate asking for you ’ ; and God breathed into him and revealed to him that it was the King of France : wherefore he rushes from his cell with great fervour, and runs to the gate ; and without any further questioning, or even having seen each other before, kneeling down with great devotion, they embraced each other, and kissed with as great

familiarity as if they had long held great friendship; but all the while they neither of them spoke: but they stayed thus embraced, with such signs of tender love, in silence. And when they had remained thus for a great while without speaking a word together, they parted each from the other: and Saint Louis set out on his journey and brother Giles returned to his cell. And as the king was leaving, a brother asked one of his companions who he was who had been in such close embrace with brother Giles; and he replied that it was Louis, King of France, who had come to see brother Giles. And when that brother had told this to the others, they were filled with great melancholy to think that brother Giles had never spoken a word to him; and they complained of it to him, saying: ‘O brother Giles, why were you so ill-mannered that to so holy a king, who came from France to see you and to hear some good word from you, you have said nothing at all?’

“Brother Giles replied: ‘Dearest brothers, do not wonder at this: for neither I to him nor he to me could speak a word; for as soon as we embraced, the light of the divine wisdom revealed and made plain to me his heart, and mine to him: and thus by divine operation, looking each into the heart of the other, we knew far better what I would say to him and he to me, than if we had spoken with the

mouth, and with greater consolation than if we had tried to explain in words what we felt in our hearts through the defect of the human tongue, which is not able clearly to express the secret mysteries of God ; it would have been rather to our discomfort than our comfort. And therefore you may know that the king parted from me marvellously content, and comforted in his mind.”

Besides the universal truth of this story, it is also most characteristic of brother Giles, as we know him in the fragmentary *Vita Sancti Ægidii*. We see him always shrinking from the irreverence of attempting to put “wisdom in a silver rod, or love in a golden bowl” ; or treating the insoluble mysteries of life as a theme for dialectical gymnastics or insincere speculation. He sought the wisdom which comes in quietness, “without noise of word, without confusion of opinions, without pride of emulation, without fence of logic.” We might almost imagine that the word came from brother Giles : “He to whom the Eternal Word speaks, is freed from many opinions.”<sup>1</sup>

His fame as a speaker of “good words” subjected him to the visit of pedants as well as of saints, and his entertainment of brother Gerard, another visitor to Monte Ripido, in which the friend of Francis and Giles, Jacoba of Settesoli,

<sup>1</sup> *Imitation of Christ*, Book 1, ch. iii.

also took part, is an amusing instance of his dealing with a display of pseudo-metaphysics.<sup>1</sup>

Setting his armament of shallow logic in array against Giles, brother Gerard proved by twelve propositions, much to his own satisfaction and the wonder of those who were present, that man was incapable of free action. Giles replied by the apparently irrelevant question: "Can you sing, brother Gerard? Sing with me." And brother Giles drew from his sleeve a cithern made of cornstalks,<sup>2</sup> such as boys are wont to make, and beginning with the first string, in rhythmical words, he proceeded along the single strings of the cithern, bringing to naught and disproving all his twelve questions."

It was in this same convent of Monte Ripido, or perhaps in his own cell, forming, as we have seen, the nucleus of the present convent, that brother Giles died, at the hour of dawn, on the feast of Saint George, fifty-two years after he had left the little chapel of San Giorgio in Assisi to seek St. Francis at Rivo Torto, and associate himself with the tiny company.

<sup>1</sup> *Actus*, ch. xlv. *Anal. fr.*, vol. iii. p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> "Saginale." The word is not found in classical Latin, but may be an adaptation of Italian, *sagginale* = corn-stalk. How a stringed instrument could be formed from such a substance it is difficult to say, though a shepherd's pipe might well have been made from it.

AGELLO.—About five kilometres from Lake Thrasymene, on a high ridge of hill, running south-east from the lake, stands the little citadel of Agello, associated by two slight incidents with brother Giles. The convent frequented by the early Franciscans has entirely disappeared, and been replaced by another, known formerly as the convent of San Francesco, but now converted into a palazzo. It is half-way up the steep street to the summit of the village, where a portion only of an ancient tower remains as sole relic of the castle. The situation is one of peculiar beauty, looking west across the intervening hills to the lake, which encloses their curves in a faint level line of blue—and east, across the broad and fertile Caina valley to the double range of hills which lie between it and Assisi.

The *Chronicle of the Twenty-four Generals* records that in the convent of Agello brother Giles was rapt in meditation one night from vespers to cock-crow, and so great were the joy and holiness of his devotions that the moonlight was faint in the lustre which streamed from his cell. From the same source we learn that Giles once undertook the journey from Agello to Assisi, in response to a summons from his superior, without even allowing himself time to return to his cell to make necessary provision for the way.

Despite a strong vein of originality, Giles idolised the rule of obedience, and the tale is told that he wandered about in forlorn aimlessness of purpose when a fortnight's independence of action had been granted him by Francis, and after four days implored that a definite mission might be given him, "since he was not able to quiet his spirit in so much liberty."<sup>1</sup> His interpretation of obedience in the act related above, may seem to us, as no doubt it did to the brothers, unreasonable in its precision; but Giles' exaltation of the virtue of obedience seems to have been based on a very sound conception of the need of immediate relation between the contemplative and active in life, or as we might put it, between theory and practice. The incident should perhaps be read in the light of his admonition to a brother,<sup>2</sup> who inquired of him whether it were not more fitting that he should remain in prayer than obey the guardian's order to go in search of bread (a problem, it will be remembered, which presented itself to brother Rufino).

Giles replied by a definition of prayer, which identifies it very closely with action, and ends thus: "I tell you, that if a man were of so great devotion and elevation of mind as to have speech

<sup>1</sup> *Twenty-four Generals, Anal. fran.*, iii.

<sup>2</sup> *Fioretti, Vita di frate Egidio*, iv.

with angels, and if in this converse he were called by his superior, he must at once leave the colloquy with the angels and obey his superior."

CETONA AND SARTEANO.—Cetona and Sarteano form with Chiusi the most southerly point of our triangle round Lake Thrasymene. These three places again fall roughly into a triangular figure about thirty kilometres in circumference, of which Chiusi is the apex, Cetona the most southerly, and Sarteano the most westerly point.

This south-east corner of Tuscany is rich in beauty. The plain is broken by low wooded hills and rocky elevations, and thus the level monotony, characteristic of the Umbrian valleys, is absent from it. The hills do not run, as in the Spoleto valley, in long parallel ranges, enclosing it, but seem to wind in and out of it as its play-mates rather than its warders. Monte Cetona is the only mountain of any commanding height, and is often cloud-capped. The little town of Cetona lies under its shadow, clustering round a hill, and surmounted by a tower fringed with rich evergreen trees. The colouring of its tiles and stone is varied and warm, and the roofs of the climbing town fall into angles of picturesque harmony.

It is, indeed, one of the most delightful of the



little hill-cities of Umbria or Tuscany, and its convent one of the most characteristic, in position and structure, of the primitive Franciscan settlements. It stands near the summit of a rocky cliff about two kilometres from the town, under the towering heights of Monte Cetona. The road to it winds past a richly wooded mound of ilex, shrub, and cypress, immediately to the west of the town, then turns sharply to the left, climbing beside a large estate, remarkable at some distance by an imposing procession of tall, slim cypresses, their dense black foliage intensified by the silvery grey of the olive gardens which clothe the hill-side. The rough woodland track leading to the convent, continues to mount above a deep and fertile ravine which separates it from the body of the mountain. Just before the convent grounds an olive garden slopes down to it, which, seen in spring, is possessed as an imperishable memory.

The ground between the olives is carpeted with pale purple irises, which, against the silver grey of the trees above them, seem from a little distance a giant bed of lavender. There is no blaze of colour, but a lucent radiance from the pale, transparent petals and silvery buds folded in close sheaths against their spear-like stems. A few steps more bring us to the convent gate, which opens on a little cloister. The dormitory of the convent runs



all round it, below which, on the right of the quadrangle, is the main mass of buildings ; and at the end opposite the gate, the chapel now used by the brothers, which, like many others, is an ugly Renaissance building. In this corner of the quadrangle a gate opens on a grass path, close under the rock, leading to the original chapel, which is much renovated, but is still approximately the same in form as when used by the first Brothers. It is larger than many of the wayside chapels, but as primitive in design, being little more than a simple room with a narrowing apse. It is built almost under the shadow of a great mass of rock, in shape not unlike the mountain summit of La Verna, and named by the Brothers after it. From a projecting rock below the chapel a picturesque view may be had of a corner of the original wooden building founded by S. Francis, to which large but simple additions have been made, rising against the steep hillside to the ancient tiled bell-tower. A little beyond the chapel, half hidden by the luxuriant undergrowth of the hillside, is a great cave, once used, it is said, for sepulture by the Brothers.

The situation of this little convent is extremely beautiful. Below it is outspread a wide tract of varied hill and valley, and the craggy mountain around it and above is clothed in rich verdure. Its wildness is of no barren sort. Herbs and grass

grow here in unwonted profusion, and cover the great masses of rock which lie like limbs of tumbled giants on the mountain side.

The kitchen garden and orchard of the brothers enclosed within the forbidden precincts have an interest for us in association with brother Giles. A pleasant story is told in the *Vita Sancti Ægidii*<sup>1</sup> of his gardening efforts in Cetona, and of an unwarranted practical joke to which they were subjected.

"Brother Giles was living in the place<sup>2</sup> of Cetona, where he had made a little garden, in which were magnificent vegetables; and as he stood, spade in hand, saying 'Our Father,' one of the brothers, tempting him, came with a great sword and began to hack the vegetables and lay them waste. Seeing which brother Giles sprang upon him with loud lamentations, and laying hold on him, put him by force out of the garden. And the brother said to him: 'O brother Giles, where are your patience and holiness?' And he said with a sigh: 'O my brother, forgive me, for you invaded me suddenly, and I was unarmed, and could not so quickly fortify myself.'"

Another story is told of an encounter between

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. fr.*, vol. iii.

<sup>2</sup> "Locus" is the term commonly used in the early records to describe the original settlements.

Giles and some Dominicans in the same place, in which the orthodoxy of the latter received rather a severe shock. The story is briefly told, but there is much to be read between the lines. The preachers, it says, departed "*male aedificati*," after a saying of brother Giles that S. John the Evangelist "*said nothing about God*" (*nihil de Deo locutus est*). The Eternal God, said Giles, was like the mountain above them, or a mountain of grain, and John was like the sparrow which in hundreds of years would make no impression upon it.

This simple simile contains an adroit comment on the tape and rule definitions of scholastic theology. The biographer does not allow us to assist at the whole interview, but putting beside this incomplete account that other of the visit to Monte Ripido, where Giles, with admirable intuition, dispelled the fumes of a dead pedantry by submitting it to the test of music, it is easy to figure his weary impatience with an uninspired and hair-splitting scholastic display, under the very shadow of the great mountain from which, in quietness and humility of spirit, these doctors might have learned something of the universal mind they thought to contain in their presumptuous and inadequate definitions.

SARTEANO is the highest point of the figure which

it forms with Cetona and Chiusi. The road to it from Cetona winds up past the convent along the mountain side. Great boulders of dislodged stone project in picturesque isolation above the road, their nakedness richly clothed in ginestra and creeping plants; and after rain the mountain side is musical with trickling streams, which run down the deep and fertile ravines into the plain. The road has in parts the character of a mountain pass, winding high above the plain, and commanding the heights and the valleys to the east of Monte Cetona, which bounds the view on the right. The little town of Cetona already lies far below, encircling its hill, close under the mountain.

Sarteano, like Cetona, is a climbing citadel, crowned with towers, but it is steeper and wilder in aspect, as is also the character of the mountains around it. From the ancient gateway an almost perpendicular street leads up to the centre of the town.

The original Franciscan dwelling, said to have been built by S. Francis in 1212, no longer exists. It stood close to the south gate of the town, on the road by which one approaches it from Cetona. A great church and convent, dedicated to S. Francis, have taken its place.

The wide moorland freedom of these heights above the lake of Chiusi is best revealed in the

cold clearness of a morning swept by the north wind, which wraps the low hills enfolding the lake in a robe of purple, recalling the heather-clad hills of Scotland, while the deep shadows cast by clouds across the plain reveal, in contrast of almost unearthly brightness, the vivid emerald of the cultivated slopes.

It is at Sarteano that Celano locates the incident related in chapter 9 of the *Speculum Perfectionis*. One of the brothers had prepared a cell for Francis, a little apart from the others, in which he might pray when he came to visit that hermitage. At first he refused it, on the ground that the cell was too grand for him, *nimis pulchra*, though Leo adds that it was simply of logs hewn with axe and mattock, which did not necessarily exceed Francis' requirements of simplicity.

The sequel, indeed, shows that his real cause of complaint was not the method, but the fact of its construction especially for him, for though Francis, no doubt in tactful consideration for the feelings of the brother, abode in the cell a few days after it had been simplified in appearance according to his instructions, with a covering within and without of stones<sup>1</sup> and boughs of trees, he plainly had still on his mind the fact of its conspicuous association

<sup>1</sup> "Silicibus," rather, pebbles or rough-cast; contrast the "lapideas" of chapter 5, which Francis particularly forbids.

with himself, and when, a few days later, a brother, who had been to look at the cell, answered Francis' enquiry as to whence he came with the words, "I come from your cell," Francis replied, "Because you have called it my cell, another shall inhabit it henceforth, and not I." The builder of the cell, though "deeply spiritual, and very intimate with blessed Francis," had less insight into his mind than his friend of a day, Orlando da Chiusi. The quotation, which Leo adds as a comment on this incident, perhaps throws some light on the readiness with which Francis accepted the wild mountain of La Verna, when the proprietorship of the humble cell at Sarteano was altogether repugnant to him. "He often used to say," adds Leo, "'The Lord when he was in the desert (*in carcere*<sup>1</sup>), and fasted forty days and forty nights, did not have a cell made there, nor a house, but abode in the mountain rock.'" Nothing is more remarkable in the early settlements of the Order than the association of the memory of their inmates with the caves or rocks of their natural surroundings, rather than with the human masonry: the buildings themselves are clearly planned so as to modify their natural background in the least possible degree. In almost every case a study of the forest homes of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the Editor's note on this passage, p. 21. *Spec. Perf.*, ed. Sabatier.

Brothers involves an appreciation of natural scenery, rather than of architecture.

We are indebted to Celano for the specification of Sarteano as the scene of yet another incident,<sup>1</sup> the pathetic incident of that winter's night when Francis felt himself assailed at the point where he might have been deemed least vulnerable. He could not by his self-inflicted strokes free himself from the desire for the sensual satisfaction and carnal relations which he had for ever foregone. So he enacted a little drama the better to convince his body, brother Ass, of the folly of its demands. "Now when he saw that his disciplining did not drive away the temptation, although he had beaten all his limbs black and blue, he opened his cell and went out into the garden and plunged into the deep snow. And, filling both his hands with snow, he welded it together and fashioned out of it seven lumps like pillars, and, standing in front of them, he began to address his body : Look, he said, this big one is your wife ; those next four are your two sons and your two daughters ; the two last are your manservant and your maidservant, whom it is fitting you should have to serve you ; and make haste, he said, to clothe them lest they die of cold. But if the thought of your manifold cares for them alarms you, be careful to serve one God."

<sup>1</sup> *Legenda Antiqua* (O. J.), p. 63, ed. Rosedale.



LE CELLE.—The account of the foundation of the little hermitage near Cortona may be briefly given from its records based on ancient manuscripts. From these we learn that in 1211 Guido, a citizen of Cortona, belonging to the great house of Vagnotelli, was received into the Order in the Tempio Maggiore of the city dedicated to Santa Maria. With the devotion of the inhabitants to S. Francis increased their desire to provide a lodging for him in the neighbourhood of the city, which he would almost of necessity pass in a journey from Assisi to Siena, or from Cetona and Sarteano northwards past the lake of Thrasymene to Arezzo. Francis agreed to their request, and took counsel with Guido as to a favourable site for such a building a little without the city, and was directed by him to the deeply wooded fold of the mountain about a mile from the north gate of the city. The place seemed well suited to Francis' purpose, the more so, perhaps, as a little church already existed there dedicated to the Archangel Michael, which might form a basis for the cells erected by the brothers. The place was granted him by the city, and he, Guido, and Silvester were the first to enter into possession.

After the death of the Emperor Frederick, patron of brother Elias, the latter returned to Cortona, and, dissatisfied with the humble Celle,





LE CELLE

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began, in 1245, to build a great church and convent within the city, as he had previously done at Assisi, and persuaded many of the brothers, who, says our authority, "were oppressed by the loneliness and much more by the narrow poverty" of the Celle, to leave the small settlement and inhabit the noble convent he had erected.<sup>1</sup> Guido and a few companions alone remained faithful to the Celle.<sup>2</sup> From 1285 onward the Celle was inhabited by the heretical sect of the Fraticelli. In 1318 they were expelled, and it remained untenanted till 1537, when the Cappuccini were established, and have since remained in possession. Those who now inhabit it are sober and gracious people, who still adhere to the ancient rule in its simplicity. With the exception of the chapel, which has been renovated, and a small dining-room reserved for visitors, the convent is bound by the rule of "clausura."

<sup>1</sup> For Elias' relations with Cortona see Dr. Lempp's admirable monograph. *Collection d'études et de documents sur l'histoire religieuse et littéraire du moyen âge*, vol. iii.

<sup>2</sup> Guido died in 1250, and was buried within the city at the request of the citizens. In 1259, when Cortona was burned and sacked by the people of Arezzo, Guido's tomb was destroyed, but his head was rescued by the sacristan and hidden in a well. In 1262, when the church was rebuilt, his head was recovered from the well (revealed by a miraculous light) and preserved as a relic in the Duomo.

In the Celle the brothers had a retreat which might elude the most persistent seeker. Up to the very brink of the ravine, on whose side the convent is built, it is entirely hidden from anyone approaching from the city, although the dark patch of wood which forms part of the convent enclosure and rises immediately above it is visible from the city gates, and forms a sure guide and landmark to the initiated, while betraying no secret to the profane.

The Celle are about an hour's walk from the city, and can be reached by two paths, the lower of which, descending rapidly from the domed church outside the north gate, is rocky, and sometimes almost precipitous. It is crossed by two torrents, and winds among boulders and through steep, rough ways—sometimes sinking deep among the olive gardens, sometimes rising into the woods of Spanish chesnut which clothe the sides of this most lovely valley. White heath and golden broom grow close about the path. This must have been the way followed by the early brothers in their passage between the city and the convent.

The upper road, of more recent construction, rises just beyond the domed church, and follows the outline of the mountain in fairly regular gradation. It is rather a rudely paved mule-track than a road, and is scarcely less beautiful than the lower way. The Celle are very like the Carceri in form, though

less minute in structure, and, like them, cling to the face of the mountain, beside a steep torrent, on which happily no spell has here been cast by Francis or Nature, but which pours down over broad, flat slabs of rock, not in tumult or agitation, but in smooth gushes of refreshing clearness. The valley is alive with streams, all flowing thus over gradual inclines of smoothly rounded rock with peaceful, unbroken melody ; even the steepest seem calm in their descent, unvexed in their passage by the agitation of conflict with jagged rocks. Several bridges span the convent torrent, across one of which the little herb garden is reached, built in steep terraces up the opposing face of cliff. A rough and steep ascent leads from the torrent up to the grassy platform fringed with a single row of cypress, which forms the piazza of entrance.

It is bounded on one side by the convent wood, to which at right angles runs the porticoed front of the building: opposite the wood its rocky side falls sheer down to the sweeping torrent, and from the remaining side can be obtained the most beautiful view which the convent commands ; for the windowed face of the building itself is set sideways towards the torrent, only at one corner looking out down the valley. Above a shoulder of rock,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A white house on the top of this rock is conspicuous from the city gate, apparently set close against the convent wood.

slightly west of the convent, and separated from it by the torrent ravine, is seen the outline of the city, and to the right of it a space of plain framed by the encircling arm of mountain to the north.

Twilight is short in the valley, but during the brief afterglow of a spring sunset, when the plain is veiled in shadow, and the little white houses sprinkled over the mountain side shine out with beacon brightness, it is difficult to imagine a retreat of more majestic and reposeful beauty. But the convent's hiding-place should be visited when day is still young, and the sun, just risen above the encircling mountain, pours down through the soft foliage of the upper woods, and dances on the glistening silver of the upturned olive leaves.

Two incidents are recorded in the early biographies as taking place at the Celle. S. Francis' gift of a mantle to a poor man in chapter 31 *Speculum Perfectionis*, and the visit of a woman whose husband enforced his will in brutal disregard of her spiritual scruples.<sup>1</sup>

The *motif* of the first is familiar, but every such incident acquires an individual character from the swift forethought with which S. Francis determined his method of giving by the exigencies of the case, his aim being always to anticipate the Brothers' attempt to prevent his ruthless spoliation of him-

<sup>1</sup> *Legenda Antiqua* (A. 7), p. 27, ed. Rosedale.

self. In this instance the gift was particularly trying to them, as it was of a new cloak which they had been at some pains to procure for their master. The recipient was a poor man, who came to the place bewailing his dead wife and the distress of his helpless family. "And the Saint, taking pity on him, said, 'I give you this cloak on condition that you give it up to no one unless he buys it fairly from you.' And the Brothers hearing this, gathered round the poor man to take the cloak from him. But the poor man, taking courage in the presence of the holy father, carried it off in his hands as his own. Finally, the brothers redeemed the cloak, obtaining that the price which was due should be paid to the poor man."

The most famous Franciscan, beside brother Elias, connected with Cortona, is Margaret, sometimes known as the Magdalen of the Order. She was born at Laviano, not far from Cortona, in 1247, the child of a farmer. Her mother died early, and she seems to have indulged her naturally sensuous nature in such pleasures as the countryside had to offer. She was seduced by a gentleman of Montepulciano, and lived in great splendour as his mistress for nine years, though her peace of mind was often broken by great anguish of spirit, and craving for the satisfaction of her deeper desires. The shock of her lover's death

(she found his murdered body under a bush by the wayside) gave form and substance to Margaret's vague dreams of amendment: she put on a penitential dress, and returned with her child to her father's house to beg his forgiveness. But, under the influence of her stepmother, he rejected her, and she resolved to go to Cortona and take the habit of the Third Order. She lived first among some ladies in the city, but after she had made proof of her holiness by constant and grievous self-mortification, she was allowed to receive the habit, and settled close to the convent of the Lesser Brothers (the Celle?). She founded a convent of the "Poverelle," and the hospital of the Misericordia. Her son was educated by her till he was old enough to go to school. It is believed that he went to Arezzo, and he also entered the Franciscan Order. From the time of her conversion, Margaret seems to have been consumed by an unappeasable consciousness of sin. Even her flashes of joy and spiritual comfort became wormwood to her, and in the midst of her extravagant feats of self-mortification, she would sometimes denounce a germ of pride which required fresh penance. But some beautiful colloquies of her calmer moments have been recorded, one of which seems peculiarly true to the Franciscan spirit. "Christ said to her: 'I have planted thee, my



child, in the garden of my Love. For thy blessed Father Francis, my beloved one, had nothing so much at heart as my love.' . . . Margaret answered : ' And wherefore, O Lord, dost thou call the Order of Lesser Brothers the Garden of Love? Hast thou no other garden wherein charity is so flourishing?' 'No,' replied Jesus, 'I find nowhere else in the world so beautiful a school of divine Love.'"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in substance from Cardinal Manning's translation of the *Auréole Séraphique*.

## MONTE CASALE AND VALLINGEGNO

**M**ONTE CASALE.—The first town of importance reached by S. Francis in a journey from La Verna across the mountains to the south-east (the direct route to Assisi), would be Borgo San Sepolcro. It is situated in the Tiber valley, soon after the river has escaped from the mountains which watched over its early course, into the first of its noble stretches of broad, unbroken plain. This plain, vast in its proportions, is impressive in its grand monotony. The mountains withdraw on either side as in reverence for the high destiny of the river which has now escaped their tutelage and rolls serenely forward to its glorious distant goal. The plain is bare of trees, save along the Tiber's banks, where mutilated poplars crowd in gaunt, undisciplined hordes, as spectators of its passage.

The city lies in the north-east corner of the plain, close under the mountains. It is of ancient but of obscure origin, which one tradition would ascribe to two pilgrims in the tenth century; who, returning from Palestine, built a little oratory in



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the plain, dedicated to the place of their pilgrimage; round this oratory, says the tradition, the city of Burgum Sancti Sepulchri sprang up. But this is plainly only an attempt to account for the present name of the city, and in this connexion may contain some elements of truth. The original name of the city, Biturgium, suggests a remoter origin.

About five miles from the city, among the mountains overlooking it, is situated the ancient hermitage of Monte Casale. When S. Francis first visited these parts, a hostel for strangers stood on the site of the present convent, slightly below the citadel of Monte Casale, which then still existed. This hostel, presented to S. Francis by the inhabitants of the city, became the basis of his settlement. Monte Casale gave to the Order a recruit named brother Angelo, a young man of noble rank, whose acceptance by S. Francis is related in the *Fioretti*, xxvi.

“S. Francis was on his way through the wild region of Borgo San Sepolcro, and as he was passing a castle named Monte Casale, a noble and delicate youth came to him and said: ‘Father, I greatly desire to be one of your brothers.’ S. Francis replied: ‘My son, you are delicate and of noble birth; perhaps you would not be able to endure our poverty and hardness.’ And

he said : 'Father, are you not men like me? Therefore, if you can endure it, so shall I be able to, by the grace of Jesus Christ.' This reply much pleased S. Francis ; so he blessed him and received him at once into the Order, giving him the name of brother Angel ; and this youth bore himself so graciously, that a short while after S. Francis made him guardian of the place which is called after Monte Casale."

Only a few rough fragments of stone and three crosses on the summit of a sharply peaked hill, now mark the site of the castle. It projects beside the steep mountain slope against which the little convent is built. The road from the city is long and gradual in ascent, winding in wide circuits round the side of the hills and pressing into the heart of the encircling mountains. Suddenly round the peak on which once stood Monte Casale, the hermitage comes into sight, hung half way up a ravine, in the midst of oak woods.

Below it, the garden slopes down in terraces to the deep valley, and to its left a narrow grove of ilex and cypress form a grave procession down the steep mountain side, whilst on its right are seen strange regular layers of smooth, curved rock, forming tier on tier among the greenery round the embrasure of the mountain side. Even from the road above, the formation is remarkable if only

for its unvaried monotony and the curious precision of its outline ; but it is still more striking on closer inspection, which is possible from the grounds of the convent, descending by steep paths among the low undergrowth to the level of the most projecting rocky ridge. It is stained in various places by the descent of streams from the water-shed above, a fall from top to base of 180 feet ; but in late spring, when rains have not been frequent, only a slight stream of wind-driven spray seems to float down into the smooth cavities at its base. Beside the waterfall, the rock is formed in broad shelves, like the berths of a ship's cabin, protected by a wide, overhanging roof. Like the strange disjointed mass of rock in the woods of La Verna, this curious ledge is known as the Sasso Spicco ; tradition says that the companions of S. Francis, with their love of natural shelters, used these storeyed shelves of rock, hung above the deep ravine, for their dormitories. Though on a lower level than the convent, they would look across to the mountains which wind away behind Borgo San Sepolcro, peering out between them into the gauntly grand Tiber valley.

The convent, now inhabited by Cappuccini, is one of the most quaint and picturesque of all the primitive Franciscan dwellings. It is, as usual, on a diminutive scale, and hewn in great part out of the

solid rock, with little adaptation to the demands of human stature.

The buildings form a picturesque group, bounded in front by a narrow terrace and balcony, overlooking the valley and rising behind to the chapel, which is still in its original state, though it has received the addition of a raised loggia to prevent the rain and snow from beating down into it. It is a small, simple building, with low rafters and a single transept, and is decently and soberly preserved. Behind the altar, slightly below the level of the chapel, is a tiny choir. Close within the entrance-door on the left, a dark vaulted passage, cut in the rock, slopes down to a grated window, through which can be seen the miniature cloisters of the convent, enclosing a stone well. Curious little china plaques, representing miracles of S. Francis, can just be discerned in the imperfect light, decorating the wall.

They are evidently of primitive and early workmanship. The monastic rule forbids access to the cloisters, so that a close inspection of them is impossible. At right angles with the low stone passage we turn into the little oratory of S. Francis, and in its left corner, opposite the altar, a few rugged steps climb through a narrow aperture into the recess which is said to have formed his bed. Day and night are as one in these



tunnelled chambers, into which scarcely a ray can penetrate through the window-slit. It was in this cramped recess, where healthful and restful sleep was impossible, that the Crucifix, preserved behind a curtain above the altar, seemed to bend and speak to Francis.

Three relics are preserved in recesses in the walls of the oratory—the skeletons of the heads of the converted robbers, the habit of a saintly inhabitant, and the crystal pyx and chalice of S. Bonaventura, who, except S. Anthony of Padua, was the most renowned inmate of the hermitage. The windows of their cells are still to be seen from the wild garden below the convent, looking out upon the valley.

There is a peculiar charm about the place of Monte Casale which is sought for in vain, even in such of the primitive buildings as the Carceri and San Damiano. It does not lie in the quaint form or proportions of the building, but in the character of its inmates. There is a gentleness and unobtrusive humility about these Cappuccini which seems to beautify and ennoble their simple speech and action. However narrowing and intellectually stunting may seem to us the tenets of their rule, it is certain that the sincerity and devotion with which they have embraced it, combined with the constant human contact into which they are

brought by its demands, has raised them from mere religious formalists and narrow votaries into beautiful human beings. All their actions have that natural grace and courtesy which is born of true refinement of spirit, and cannot be superimposed on a foundation of vulgarity or stupidity. It is sometimes found among simple peasants, unlearned in the coarse traffic of wealth, but they are seldom so removed from petty and distracting cares as these gentle brothers. Like their master Francis, they are not sad of aspect. There is a subdued, half-revealed radiance in their patient faces, which makes them glad but not hilarious companions. They seem to communicate power, because in some deep and vital way they are in touch with it: they have in them the making of idealists; but they have little scope, in the narrow limits of their life, for a practical or even conscious realisation of the force which is purifying them.

The most famous incident connected with Monte Casale is the conversion of the three robbers, related in chapter 66 of the *Speculum Perfectionis* and in chapter xxvi. of the *Fioretti*. The former is conspicuous, as usual, for its directness and the absence of any attempt to obtain or heighten effects by any artificial concentration of interest. The exact location of the site—*super Burgum Sancti Sepulchri*—so familiar in Leo's narrative, indicates

his personal knowledge of the place. In the *Fioretti* we have, as usual, more of a composition: each of the various elements of the picture is more clearly defined; the contrasts are heightened, and a fictitious unity is obtained by crowding into one day an episode which plainly extended over a considerably longer period: the conversion of the robbers, instead of being a gradual and rational process, in response to continued consideration and personal appeal, becomes a sudden, almost miraculous, conviction of sin, immediately after partaking of Francis' alms, and in definite answer to his prayer. A more detailed comparison between the two versions may perhaps not be out of place: the points of difference are suggestive and interesting.

It appears from the *Speculum* that the robbers who inhabited the wild forest country round the convent of Monte Casale, used sometimes to come begging bread at the convent, and the Brothers were at issue as to the wisdom of providing for them. When Francis came to the settlement the case was at once put before him, and he was ready with a judgment. He suggested that several of the Brothers should take some good bread and wine into the forest, and spreading a cloth on the ground, call on the robbers to eat, entertaining them in a friendly way during the meal, and only

making terms with them afterwards, namely, that they would promise for the love of God not to kill or do injury to the person of anyone. "For even if they will not at once grant all you ask, yet even they will promise you this for the sake of your humility and your love." Another day they were to add to the meal eggs and cheese, and after the repast, making appeal still to the self-interest of the robbers, were to represent to them the unsatisfactory precariousness of their mode of life and the greater wisdom of a regular service of God, with provision for their bodily necessities in this life and the assurance of provision for their souls hereafter.

S. Francis had calculated justly the effect of this combined appeal. The robbers recognised and discharged their debt to their simple benefactors, and by degrees the parts of servant and served began to be reversed. "Moved by the humility and friendly bearing of the brothers towards them, they began themselves humbly to serve the brothers, carrying wood on their shoulders as far as the hermitage, and, further a few amongst them entered the religion."

In the *Fioretti* the noble youth Angelo, who joined S. Francis from the fortress of Monte Casale, is responsible as guardian for repulsing the robbers, who here number only three: this

he does with violent speech and remonstrance. The robbers have scarcely departed in great confusion when S. Francis appears, bearing the bread and wine which he and his companions had collected, and hearing of the guardian's act, he sharply reproves him for his conduct, "For sinners are led back to God better by gentleness than cruel condemnation : for which reason our master, Jesus Christ, whose gospel we have promised to observe, says that the whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick : and that he was not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance : and therefore he often ate with them. Therefore, since you have acted against love and against the holy gospel of Christ, I command you, by holy obedience, to take this bag of bread which I have collected, and this flask of wine, and to go after them diligently, over hill and valley, till you find them, and to give them all the bread and wine from me : and then to kneel before them, and humbly tell them your fault of cruelty ; and afterwards pray them, from me, not to do any more harm, but to fear God and not displease him any more : and if they will do this, I promise to provide for them in their need, and to give them always something to eat and drink ; and when you have said this to them, come humbly back again." No sooner have the robbers begun to partake

of the bread and wine than they begin to bewail their sins and punishment awaiting them. After long lamentation they go to S. Francis and confess their sins and their fear of punishment, and are finally all received into the Order.

The spirit of this version is as true as the *Speculum* to the essentials of the story, but its modifications are an instructive example of an early stage in the metamorphosis of history, in its passage through one of many mediums—popular religious tradition.

The only other noteworthy connexion of S. Francis with Monte Casale is related in the fourth Consideration of the Holy Stigmata in the *Fioretti*. This visit took place after the last sojourn at La Verna, when the fast of S. Michael was over, during which S. Francis received the impression of the Stigmata.

After a touching farewell to all his companions, human, animal and inanimate, Francis, mounted on an ass, departed with brother Leo for Assisi, across the mountains to Borgo; for the steep road which now descends south-east of La Verna to Pieve San Stefano is of recent formation. The local records of Chiusi, Monte Aguto, and Anghiari preserve the memory of his passing, but in our chief authority, the *Fioretti*, no mention is made of his halting-places till Borgo San Sepolcro was

reached. His progress seems to have been a triumphal one, for the rumour had spread of some spiritual triumph on the mountain, and the crowds were expectant of miraculous manifestations of power.

At Borgo San Sepolcro, Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem was re-enacted. "Before he drew near to the city, the crowds from the city and the hamlets round came to meet him, and many of them went in front with olive branches in their hands, crying aloud : 'Behold the saint, behold the saint !' And from their devotion and the desire which the people had to touch him, they made a great crowd and pressed about him ; but he, with his mind exalted and rapt into God by contemplation, however much he was touched or caught hold of or pulled by the people, was as if insensible, hearing nothing that was said or done around him : nor did he even notice that they were passing through that city or that district. And when he had passed the Borgo, and the crowd had returned to their homes, he arrived at a leper house, a good mile beyond the Borgo, and coming to himself, as if he had come from another world, the contemplator of heavenly things said to his companion : 'When shall we be getting to the Borgo ?' In truth, his soul, fixed and rapt in contemplation of heavenly things, had felt nothing earthly, neither



change of place, nor of time, nor people meeting him. And this happened several other times, as his companions could prove from their own clear experience."

In the evening Francis and his companions climbed from the plain to the settlement at Monte Casale, and spent the night there before their onward journey. Whilst there he restored an epileptic brother to sanity and self-control.

Had Francis planned an evasion of the crowd's attentions he could scarcely have effected it better than by such complete abstraction; for if the Italian crowd of his time at all resembled, as seems evident, the crowd of to-day, indifference would be the only effectual rejoinder to its curiosity. The immunity of a traveller after the "borgo" has been passed is a fact on which, after a little experience, he allows himself to rely with a sense of security. Nothing is more familiar to the traveller in these unfrequented parts of Italy than the sudden halt and swift grouping of the pursuing crowd precisely at the last boundary of the town. The old habit of caution in leaving its secure confines, learned when the region without was savage, seems to have persisted for centuries after the cause of fear had been removed.



VALLINGEGNO.—At Citta di Castello Francis and Leo, on this homeward journey from La Verna, would leave the Tiber valley and wind up amongst the mountains bounding it to the east, crossing the pass of Monte Frontano and Pietralunga, and resting awhile at the abbey of San Benedetto Antico before journeying on to Gubbio.

The ancient Roman city of Eugubium is built on the face of the rocky mountains below Monte Catria, overlooking a tableland of no great extent, that was probably once a mountain lake. It is enclosed on every side by hills, both bare and wooded, and far behind, to the south-east, are seen in shadowy distance the lofty slopes of Monte Subasio. Gubbio does not, like Assisi, look across the plain to a long, scarcely undulating line of hills. The horizon is broken by peaks, diverse in form and angles, intercrossing in pleasant variety of outline.

On a sunless day the city lies in sombre repose against the mountain side ; but when gleams of sunlight break upon the plain, rousing the flitting cloud-shadows, the city, too, wakes from its grey lethargy, and glows into rich autumn colouring of brown and dusky red, with the flash of green shutters above a dazzling white pavement, and of bright weeds from every crevice of the ancient walls. Gubbio does not enring the steep hillside like Assisi. It is outspread with less perfect struc-

tural harmony—in longer, flatter lines ; but every street has its picturesque angle, every terrace its ancient arch or gateway, and the main Corso, reaching almost the entire length of the town, is remarkable for its noble proportions. From its eastern extremity it is overlooked in its whole extent by the figure of a pope. The conception is imposing, though the figure obstructs the view over the eastern mountains, which would have been an impressive termination to the long Corso. High above the town, on the barren peak which overtops it, and approached from the city wall by a meagre line of cypresses, is the convent of Sant' Ubaldo, the saint and martyr of Gubbio.

The ancient convent of San Jeronimo, in a hollow of the steep mountain side without the eastern gate of the city, and the two large monasteries within its bounds, were all built subsequently to S. Francis, though one of them contains a chapel associated with him, and the story of the wolf is, of course, sufficient to establish his connexion with the place.

It was at Gubbio also that Francis, in the early days of his conversion, was received and clothed by one of its citizens, Jacob of Spada Lunga, when he had been despoiled by robbers and left naked in a ditch.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the family chapel of San Jeronimo, in Rome, a tablet records this deed of kindness, placing it in the year 1206.

During a visit paid by S. Francis to Gubbio, in 1222, a cavalier, famed for his warlike exploits, came to him and begged admittance into the Order. He was enrolled among the brothers, and received the name of Benvenuto. He undertook the humblest duties, and made the lepers his particular charge.

The Perugia road crosses the plain in a direct line from the centre of Gubbio, and winds up among the wooded hills that form its south-western boundary, continuing to climb past Vallingegno and the hill-set village of Petraja, beneath which is situated, among the woods, the chapel of Caprignone, where Francis is said to have convoked the second or third chapter.

Soon after this point the summit of the pass is reached, and the heights of Monte Subasio become constantly and familiarly visible. The limits of Perugia are also clearly seen to the south-west. After a long and rapid descent over a wild, wind-swept ridge, surrounded on all sides by mountains, the road to Assisi turns sharply to the left, whilst a little further along the Perugia road the convent of Farneto is seen among the trees, where tradition shows a now withered tree, sprung from S. Francis' staff.

About fourteen kilometres from Gubbio, along this road, are seen on a low hill, at a little distance

to the left of the road, and somewhat below it, the ruins of the ancient castle of Vallingegno, still forming a distinguishable group of masonry. Above this hill, to the right, is a large building of somewhat irregular structure, only distinguished from the numerous farm-buildings of the district by a simple bell-tower, marking the presence of a chapel. Imbedded in the farm-building is the old parish church of San Verecondo, the martyr and patron saint of the district. The church formerly made part of a Benedictine convent which existed in the time of S. Francis, and which is said to have often harboured him on his passage between Gubbio and Assisi. The convent is now destroyed, though the old gateway and traces of the original building are still distinguishable in the farm which occupies its site.

It is built round three sides of a courtyard,<sup>1</sup> the fourth being filled by a chapel of comparatively modern date; from its vestry a few steps lead down into the square crypt, lighted only by one tiny window behind the altar, deep-set in the massive east wall. This vault-like chamber, into which daylight can hardly penetrate, is the ancient church of S. Verecondo, in which S. Francis is said sometimes to have officiated. It is supported

<sup>1</sup> The buildings are now inhabited by the parish priest and a family of labourers.

in the centre by a single square stone pillar of immense thickness, from which spring the massive cross-beams of the low, scarcely-vaulted roof. The apse, too, is low and broad, in keeping with the sturdy proportions of the tiny chapel. In a stone coffin below the plain stone altar are preserved the bones of San Verecondo.

Tradition says that Francis, returning from La Verna (perhaps after his last visit), came to Gubbio. "And one day, when it was growing dusk [S. Francis] mounted on an ass, and his shoulders covered with a rough sack, was passing with a brother, his companion, along the road to S. Verecondo, when those who were at work in their fields hailed him, saying : 'Brother Francis, stay the night with us, and do not go any further, for savage wolves roam about in these parts, who will devour your ass, and will do harm to you and your companion.' At these words, the saint replied : 'I have done no harm to brother wolf, that he should dare to eat our brother, the ass. Good health to you, my sons : fear God.' And so brother Francis went on his way, unharmed."

Brother wolf seems to have been a rather persistently unwelcome frequenter of the wild forest land round Gubbio. His famous encounter with and conquest by Francis is recorded in chapter xxi. of the *Fioretti*.

“At the time when S. Francis was living in the city of Gubbio, there appeared in the country round Gubbio an enormous wolf, terrible and savage, who ate not beasts only, but also men. The townsfolk, meanwhile, lived in great fear, for sometimes it approached the city; and they all wore arms when they went outside the city, as if they were going to battle; but for all this they could not defend themselves against him when one of them met him alone; and for fear of this wolf, they came to such a pass that no one dared to go outside the place. Wherefore S. Francis, taking pity on the men of the place, made up his mind to go out to this wolf, though the townsfolk, with one accord, advised him not to; so, making the sign of the most holy cross, he went out from the place with his companions, putting his whole trust in God. And when the others feared to go any further, S. Francis went alone towards the place where the wolf was.

“And lo, in the sight of many of the townsfolk who had come to see this miracle, the said wolf made for S. Francis with open mouth, and as he came near, S. Francis made the sign of the most holy cross over him, and said thus to him: ‘Come here, brother wolf; I command you, by Christ, neither to harm me or anyone else.’ Behold a wonder! Directly S. Francis had made the sign

of the cross, the terrible wolf shut his mouth and stopped running ; and when he was bidden, he came gently as a lamb and lay down at the feet of S. Francis. Then S. Francis spoke to him thus : ‘ Brother wolf, you have done much harm in these parts and many grievous deeds, spoiling and killing God’s creatures without his permission ; and not only have you killed and devoured beasts, but you have dared to kill men made in the image of God : wherefore you are worthy of the gallows, like the worst thief and murderer, and the whole people cry out and murmur against you, and all this place is your enemy. But it is my will, brother wolf, to make peace between you and them, so that you may offend them no more, and they may forgive you all your past injuries, and neither men nor dogs shall pursue you any more.’

“ And when he had said this, the wolf, with motions of his body and his tail and his eyes, and with inclination of his head, made sign of assent to what S. Francis said, and of his will to observe it. Then S. Francis said again : ‘ Brother wolf, since you are willing to make and to keep this pact, I promise you that I will have you provided with food, as long as you live, by the men of this place, so that you will suffer hunger no more ; for well I know that it is for hunger you have done all this evil. But since I have won this grace for you,



I want you to promise me, brother wolf, that you will never again hurt any human being, nor animal. Will you promise me this?' And the wolf, by bending his head, gave clear signs that he promised it.

"And S. Francis said to him : 'Brother wolf, I want you to pledge me your faith to this promise, so that I can put perfect trust in it. And S. Francis, stretching out his hand to receive his pledge, the wolf raised his right paw in front of him and put it gently on S. Francis' hand, giving him such sign of his good faith as he was able. Then S. Francis said : 'Brother wolf, I charge you, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come with me, doubting nothing, and we will go together and confirm this peace in God's name.' And the wolf went with him obediently, like a gentle lamb : seeing which, the townsfolk wondered greatly. And the news spread straightway throughout the city, so that all the people, men and women, great and small, young and old, hurried to the piazza to see the wolf with S. Francis. And when the people were all gathered together, S. Francis rose to preach to them, saying, amongst other things, how for their sins God had sent such misfortunes and pestilences, and how far more perilous are the flames of hell, which the damned must suffer eternally, than the rage of the wolf, which can only kill the body : how much, then,



should men fear the mouth of hell, when so great a multitude holds in fear and trembling the mouth of a little animal. Therefore turn, my dear ones, to God, and do meet penance for your sins, and God will deliver you from the wolf at this time, and in time to come from hell-fire.' And when he had done preaching, S. Francis said: 'Listen, my brothers: Brother wolf, who is here before you, has promised me, and pledged his faith, to make peace with you, and not to hurt you in anything, and you will promise him to give him daily all that is necessary, and I will be his surety that he will faithfully observe the terms of this peace.' Then all the people, with one accord, promised to feed him regularly. And S. Francis said to the wolf, before them all: 'And you, brother wolf, do you promise to keep with them this pact of peace, that you shall hurt neither men, nor beasts, nor any other creature?' And the wolf knelt down, and bowed his head; and with gentle motions of his body and tail and ears, expressed as well as he could that he would keep that pact with them. S. Francis said: 'Brother wolf, as you gave me a pledge of the promise outside the gate, pledge me now your promise before all the people, and that you will not play me false for the surety I have given for you.' Then the wolf, raising his right paw, put it in the hand of S. Francis. And at this act, and those which have

been told above, there was such great joy and wonder among all the people, through devotion to the saint, and the novelty of the miracle and the peace with the wolf, that all began to cry out to heaven, praising and blessing God who had sent S. Francis, through whose merits they had been delivered from the mouth of the cruel beast.

“And after this the wolf lived for two years in Gubbio ; and he went tamely in and out of the houses, from door to door, without doing harm to anyone, or having any harm done to him ; and he was fed courteously by the people ; and as he went about like this through the place and among the houses, no dog ever barked after him. At last, after two years, brother wolf died of old age : whereat the citizens were sorely grieved, for seeing him go about so gently in the city, they were the better able to bear in mind the virtue and holiness of S. Francis.”

It is possible that this may be a symbolical account of the conversion of Fra Lupo, the brigand of La Verna, who subsequently became Fra Agnello, but it is perhaps unnecessary to seek for such an interpretation of the miracle. It is certain that S. Francis possessed, as an active force, that mysterious power which perhaps lies dormant in all men, of penetrating to the springs of spiritual energy in the lower animals, possibly even in in-

animate matter, and quickening them to vital response. The susceptibility and attraction which is born of a profound and comprehensive love seems capable of bringing this latent power to realisation : but few men are penetrated by love of this rare quality ; therefore, to most, the wide realm of nature, of which man is hitherto the flower and crown, lies unintelligible and unresponsive. The mysterious, attractive power of personality is as yet but faintly explored : we know only this negative truth about it—that the faintest shade of antagonism is fatal to its exercise ; for the rest, we mutely bow before it as before an unknown but felt divinity. The permanence of brother wolf's conversion when the spell of his subduer's power was withdrawn, is a more doubtful element in the story : the incident quoted above seems to suggest that fleshly fears were still strong in the dwellers round Gubbio, and no conquest of man or beast is compatible with fear.

## TWO UMBRIAN SOLITUDES

L'EREMITA.—“Above the solitude of Cesi, towers a very savage mountain, beloved by the seraphic father, and often visited by him: there he constructed a humble cabin, woven together from the branches of trees, for shelter against the inclemency of the cold.”<sup>1</sup> In these meagre terms an early writer describes Francis' shelter in Monte Maggiore above the site of the ancient city of Carsulæ. His biographers are always guarded in the terms they use to describe his solitudes. Their lack of intimate or even superficial acquaintance with them does not allow them to go beyond a certain vague definition which might cover any mountain retreat. Loneliness is for them interchangeable with barren and forbidding desolation. L'Eremita of Monte Maggiore may, with Lo Speco of Monte Pancrazio, be ranked next to La Verna in remoteness and in the wild and romantic beauty of its surroundings. They are far more really secluded, and adapted to quite another purpose than the hermitages of the Celle, the Carceri, and others in

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. fran.*, i. 377 seq.

the nearer neighbourhood of towns intended as more permanent dwellings for the brothers, from which they could have daily intercourse with the life of the town. These mountain solitudes, on the contrary, perhaps additionally dear to S. Francis from their reminder of Christ's choice of a place for prayer, were visited only occasionally for periods of refreshment and solitary meditation.

It is doubtless to such hermitages as these that the quaint instructions apply, contained in the *Opuscoli di S. Francesco*,<sup>1</sup> under the heading *Collationes Monasticæ III*. The attribution of this special little hermitage rule to S. Francis has not been questioned. It may be due to him : its composition clearly belongs to the early days of the Order, though after the institution of more distinctive buildings than Francis would at first countenance ; it deserves quotation for the quaint simplicity of its conception and its comparative unfamiliarity.

“Let those who desire to live religiously in hermitages, be three or four at most. Let two of them be mothers and have two sons, or one at least. Let the first two live the life of Martha, and the other two the life of Mary Magdalene. But let those who live the life of Mary have one

<sup>1</sup> Edition of *M.R.P.* Bernardo da Fivizzano, Florence. Tip. della SS. Concezione di Raffaello Ricci, 1880.

cloister, and each his own place, so that they do not live or sleep together. And let them always say Compline day by day at sunset. Let them be careful to keep silence and say their Hours. Let them rise at dawn, and seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. At a convenient hour let them say Primes and Terce, and after Terce they may break silence and talk, and go to their mothers; and when it is pleasing to them, they may ask alms from them for the love of the Lord God, like the poorest beggars. Later, let them say Sestines, Nones, and Vespers at their proper time. Into the cloister where they live they must not let anyone enter—nor must anyone eat there. Let those brothers who are mothers see that they are kept apart from everyone, so that no one may speak with them. Nor must the sons speak with anyone except their mothers and their Guardian, when it shall please him to visit them with God's blessing. And sometimes the sons must assume the office of the mothers, according as it shall mutually seem best to them to apportion their time. Let them diligently and studiously observe all these things."

The village of Cesi, where Francis would no doubt lodge before proceeding to his rude mountain hut of boughs, lies outstretched on a narrow ledge of rock as on a bed, canopied by a steep

ilex-covered peak of the Maggiore range, and looking out over the wide Nera valley to Narni in the south-west corner, while Terni lies just below, and Monte Pancrazio bounds the southern horizon. L'Eremita, which is perched close under the summit of Monte Maggiore, is reached from Cesi by steep and rocky paths, winding up perilously through the low, shrubby undergrowth, where no way seems possible. The mountain side is wild and stony—barren in parts, in others sown with patches of short-cropped grass, but even these are strewn with the sharp rocky fragments, which from time to time have broken away from the face of the mountain. As the path approaches l'Eremita it becomes more defined, bordered on the left, where it overlooks the valley, by a row of gnarled and thick-trunked ilex trees.

The convent is entered through a little courtyard, a foraging ground for stray lean pigs, which form a fitting prelude to the half-ruined desolation of the place. The buildings are now inhabited by peasants who have turned the lower cells into rude stables for their beasts : the cloisters and refectory, however, are intact, and the cells of the long dormitory above are still used as bedrooms. The living-room of the family is spacious but dark, for there is no window, and it is lit only through the door which opens on the cloister. The huge stone cave-

like chimney suggests that this was the kitchen of the Brothers. Two dismantled chapels—a lower and an upper—are imbedded in the farm buildings: the upper has scarcely more than an attic-stair for its approach, and is full of lumber. It contains a small portrait of S. Francis in oils, carelessly flung among the other litter on the floor.

The convent, though interesting from its age and position, did not exist in the time of S. Francis. It was built by Paul of Foligno in 1355<sup>1</sup> and dedicated to the Virgin Annunziata. The cave inhabited by S. Francis, and the oratory of Bernardino of Siena and Francis of Pavia, are to be seen higher on the wooded mountain side.

From the convent one steps out on to a grassy plateau sloping gently to a beautiful wood of beech and evergreen, and overhanging a deep valley. Far below it is outspread a wide and undulating plain, divided by low hills and a single mountain-line from the Tiber valley. Acquasparta lies a few miles to the north-west, and further northwards, between the hills, it looks to Todi,<sup>2</sup> the home of the poet Jacopone.

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. fran.*, i. 377-8.

<sup>2</sup> The city of Todi, one of the most beautiful and characteristic of Italy's ancient cities, stands on a wooded height above the Tiber valley. The ancient walls are still in part preserved, and the steep streets of the city are rich in arches and fragments of rare and noble masonry. The Roman eagle is prominent in the device of every



The rich meadows and gently sloping woodland which cover the whole of the region overlooked by l'Eremita are not unlike, though on a larger scale, the meadowlands of England and France ; but the closely-packed fortress-like villages, still bounded by their strong bulwarks as when the petty tyrant gathered his dependants into his castle precincts, are a strange reminder of the stormy past they have known. One of these "paesi"—Portaria—lies immediately below l'Eremita, separated from it by a ravine. It stands above the ancient Roman road, the great Via Flaminia, which now resembles a dry

gateway and public building. The fine piazza of the duomo is at the summit of the town. It is surrounded by majestic buildings, but its crowning glory is the nobly sculptured and richly coloured façade of the duomo. The convent of the Franciscans at Todi stands on an eminence west of the city, separated from it by a shallow valley. Below it the Tiber, leaving the broader plain, winds away to the south-west between richly-wooded shores in character not unlike the steep wooded banks of the Wye round Tintern. To the north the low hills open out towards Perugia, giving sight of distant ranges beyond. A grassy way bordered by limes leads up to the convent. The buildings, which were founded by Francis, are of great antiquity, but not open to women, as the brothers still inhabit them.

Another Franciscan, native of Todi, was brother Roger, who received the habit in 1216 from S. Francis. He died in 1237. Few details of his life are known, save that he was the spiritual director of the Clarices at S. Damiano and a close friend of Philippa, a maiden of high birth and native of Todi, who took the habit at S. Damiano.

river-bed hedged with dog-rose, and bordered by low oak woods. Portaria, within its massive girdle of walls, climbs in almost single procession of irregular houses to the ruins of an ancient church or temple which crown its summit. Into the common stones of its masonry are welded massive fragments of Etruscan and Roman work transported from the great city which stood scarcely a mile to the south of this spot.

In Francis' time the Roman road, passing over the site of the vanished Citta di Carsulæ, must have been still the high road from Acquasparta to Rome. The city is laid level with the meadows, though one glorious relic of its past remains in the triumphal arch, which in lonely and solemn splendour towers above the country-side, pronouncing the dirge of the proud and ancient city. The steep road up to it is rough with obstructing blocks of stone, and flanked with ruined fragments of wall and half-defined shapes of masonry. Through the gateway, of which the inner shell alone remains, the paven, grass-grown way passes till it is lost among the meadows, roughly marked only upon the hillside by relics of a lizard-haunted wall. Two young oaks spring up beside each portal of the great arch, their delicate green caressing its hoary age. Conspicuous for miles around, this solemn arch has power to cast a spell upon the



LO SPECO OF MONTE PANCRAZIO

(LOOKING TOWARDS NARNI)



country-side. The generations which have passed since it stood a landmark to Francis on his way to that Rome of the Cæsars of which it was once a symbol, seem gathered into the shadow of its age, as one generation : the distance of ages is bridged, and we stand on common ground of time with him, perhaps nearer in spirit than he to the great Roman world. We do not know what power it had to stir him after the current of his early enthusiasm was turned ; but the noble Roman relics with which he was surrounded in his native town must have given shape to some of those first dreams of glory.

LO SPECO.—The tiny oratory of Lo Speco is said to have existed before the time of S. Francis. Like the Portiuncula, tradition ascribes it to S. Benedict. In a journey across the mountains from Greccio to Narni it may have attracted the attention of S. Francis ; but we have no record of his first association with it. Like most of the Franciscan hermitages, it eludes observation till within the last few yards from the entrance ; and when only the oratory existed it was still less obtrusive, on a tiny plateau, overshadowed by a towering rock, high up on the steeply wooded northern slopes of Monte Pancrazio.

The road from Narni to the Sacro Speco rises immediately above the city into the wild uplands of

the mountain ridge of Monte Pancrazio, which forms the southern boundary of the Terni valley. The width of view and invigoration of the air are exquisitely refreshing after the heavy greenery of the Narni gorge. The little hermitage is about three hours distant from the city, and can with difficulty be found without a guide. The road is one of the most beautiful imaginable. The breadth of the mountain ridge around it is in many parts so great as to hide the valley from view, leaving only the beautiful foreground of Alpine meadows, green with waving corn and interspersed with young oak growth and wild olive gardens, and beyond, the far horizon of crossing mountain chains, crowned to the south-east by the snowy peak of Monte Terminillo, where it towers above the low branch of Apennines dividing the Terni valley from the lofty plain of Rieti. To the south-west lie the wide flats of the Tiber valley, broken by the beautiful single form of Monte Oreste, and in far distance the Campagna, bounded by the Romagna Alps. From the summit of Pancrazio, when the atmosphere is clear, the dome of S. Peter's itself is visible to the furthest stretch of sight.

For the first half of the journey, the path, though often rocky, is clearly defined; but from the village of Itieli, where the wooded front of the mountain which conceals the Sacro Speco comes into view,

the true mountain climb begins. This strangely picturesque village falls steeply down the hill-side in a ruin of broken walls and ivy-covered arches. A crown of habitable houses is still left to it, and it is beautiful in its decay to the outward eye; but within the hollow gateway everything about the single rugged street betokens poverty and want.

From this point the way demands real knowledge; rough sheep-tracks through the mountain thickets and among the low bushes of the short-turfed stony downs are the only paths; and at the last stage of the journey, where, leaving the upper slopes of Monte Pancrazio to the right, the traveller turns his face northwards to wind up on the wooded steep mountain side where the convent nestles, the path has to be felt for rather than seen—a rocky way at best, in the midst of dense evergreen and on narrow ledges round the edge of a half-dried waterfall. A simple cross at the last corner before the convent gives notice of its near neighbourhood, and a grass-grown path broadens out before the gate, walled on one side by the mountain rock.

The convent door is approached by a low-roofed piazza, whose open arches frame the valley and the opposing mountains. Through a chapel of more recent date, immediately within the entrance door, the original portions of the tiny convent are reached

—very little subsequent to S. Francis, and remaining still in their primitive condition.<sup>1</sup> Its most fascinating feature is the refectory built by S. Bernardino, still unaltered, with its long worm-eaten table, divided from the passage and stone washing basin by a lattice screen. Here guests are still fed with simple and unostentatious hospitality by the three Brothers who are the sole inmates of this, the smallest of the hermitages, the only one, it seems, to which the above-quoted rule for mothers and sons might still apply. These Brothers are gentle, unprofessional people, who welcome strangers, and take a simple, unaffected pleasure in human converse. The convent owns two wells, one of historic sanctity, converted into wine by S. Francis in a case of great emergency; the other, outside in the terraced garden, an echoing well, formed like that of the Carcerelle.

From the garden a grassy way, starry with daisies, leads up beneath the overhanging mountain rock to the little plateau, immediately above the convent, where stand the buildings most associated with Francis, the oratory and cell which first drew him to the spot. The oratory is a simple strip of

<sup>1</sup> The convent appears to have been built by S. Bernardino of Siena, "who had the little convent built under the holy father's seal; six cells were added afterwards, not for convenience, but for necessity."



room roughly walled with stone, and adjoining it is the cell, lit by a tiny window in a deep recess, looking out towards the eastern mountains. The cell contains the bed of Francis, now enclosed, to secure it from the depredations of relic-seekers, and a rude hearth and chimney.

Immediately outside it is the rugged, uncouth pillar on which the angel took his stand, who during a night of troubled sleep played joy and comfort into Francis' heart with his viol.<sup>1</sup> The event is commemorated in the seal of the Province, which represents Francis in prayer and the angel above him playing on his lyre. A huge hollow bole of Spanish chesnut, renewed by many young shoots, stands close by, an incontestable witness to the credible miracle of the planting and growth of Francis' chesnut staff. Beyond it is the convent meadow where the ass and her colt pasture in the shadow of the mountain beeches. In the very bowels of the rock which shelters the little plateau is the oratory of S. Anthony, no lover of the light, it seems ; for no gleam can penetrate to the end of the tortuous rocky stair which climbs up to the extremity of the cavern. This cavern has more recent associations for the Brothers, and of a tragic nature. Scarcely twenty years ago their hospitality was abused by three men, who through the treachery

<sup>1</sup> *Anal. fran.*, i. p. 377.

of the cook had knowledge of money within the convent. They murdered the Brothers (an unnecessary violence, it would seem, since the most potent cries for help would be unavailing), then proceeded to divide the spoils in the narrow vault-like oratory of S. Anthony. But here the fear of betrayal from those within the conspiracy led them to fresh murder of the cook and one of their number, and the Brothers still hold a torch up to show with awe the dark blood-stains on the rock.

From the grassy alleys above the convent, Itieli is seen to the left, defined in outline against the mountain background, and, beautifully grouped upon a lower hill, the picturesquely tiled village of S. Urbano, more ruddy than is usual in these mountain villages. It is from this that Lo Speco is frequently named the convent of S. Urbano.

In the past, the whole of the plain outspread below had been a forest, and in the neighbourhood of the mountains it is still more wild and wooded than many of the other river valleys. Across the varied plain, and forming its northern wall, are the heights of Monte Maggiore, where till mid-day Cesi lies slumbering in shadow on its rocky ledge beneath a mighty cliff of verdurous rock, and far to the left the sight is led up the gently undulating plain to Acquasparta. This place is, as the Brothers say, a paradise in summer, when

nightingales fill the green woods with their singing, shaded by the wooded mountain from any but the earliest sunrays ; but in winter it is bleakly silent and reft of song, and open to the beating north wind across the plain.

## THE VALLEY OF RIETI

THE Valley of Rieti contains within its comparatively small area several of the most characteristic primitive Franciscan colonies, all within easy reach of one another in this remote corner of Umbria, like a family which has migrated from the fatherland, but not lost its unity and cohesion. It will be well briefly to indicate the position of the valley itself, before proceeding to a description of the individual hermitages. The plain, or rather plateau, of Rieti lies in the extreme south-east corner of Umbria, almost within the province of the Abruzzi. It forms the bed of the Velino, which enters at its southern extremity near the ancient Roman city of Rieti, and flows through the centre of the plain, till in its north-west corner the mountains which enclose it draw together and confine the river in a narrow fertile valley, through which it flows, gathering volume from tributary streams, and concentrating force for its mighty leap into the plain of Terni.

It is hard to realise that the plain of Rieti is in fact a mountain plateau till one has followed the

river to this point, where it sweeps in a stupendous cascade down the sheer descent and boils frothing along in the valley far below. It is now veiled in a mist other than its own spray. The smoke of a great factory rises obscuring the cascade and polluting the fresh air with gaseous fumes which cling round the river long after it has reached the valley and joined its waters with the broad Nera river on which Terni stands. Both these streams flow full and swiftly, in refreshing contrast with the wide, waterless riverways of the Spoleto valley.

A road now leads from the lower valley to the upper, winding in gradual ascent round the mountains which separate them, and which Francis, in his journeys from Rome to Rieti, would have crossed by rough mountain tracks. At Marmore, situated at the summit of the cascade, the road divides into two branches, which, running parallel for a short while on either side of the river, widely diverge before entering the plain of Rieti. They enter it at the north-west and north-east, and passing round it on either side meet again at the city.

From Marmore the left branch follows the right river-bank for a while, then turns off sharply among the hills and leads through a widening gorge to the village of Piediluco, which lies under shadow of its ruined castle in half embrace of the

Lake of Velino. One may realise again here the elevation of these upper valleys, for the low green hills that enfold the lake in pliant curves are indeed the eastern slopes of the mountains, which on their further side fall steeply down to the level of the Terni plain. On its eastern side, the lake has a low reed-fringed shore sloping gently up to the foot of the hill-set village of Labra, behind which the mountains spread into the dim distance, rising in varied links of a blue chain to their central snowy gem, Monte Terminillo, the shining guardian of this plateau.

Several insignificant miracles are connected with the Lake of Velino, or, as Celano always calls it, the Lake of Rieti. Francis would pass by it in his journeys from Assisi to Rieti, and must have found joy and refreshment on the peaceful expanse of water, in whose green depths the low hills are mirrored. One of his adventures on the lake is too characteristic to pass unrecorded.

“S. Francis was going to the hermitage of Greccio, by way of the Lake of Rieti, and the fisherman belonging to the little boat in which he was sitting gave him a young water-bird, that he might have joy in the Lord; and the blessed father, looking on with joy, opened his hands and invited it gently to fly freely away. And when it would not go, but sat in his hands as in a nest,

the saint raised his eyes and remained in prayer. And when after some time he had, as it were, come back to himself, he sweetly instructed the little bird to go away without fear in freedom as before. And when it had received permission with a blessing, bending its body forward, it flew joyfully away.”<sup>1</sup>

The other and main branch of the road from Marmore follows the line of the wooded mountain on the right of the river, passing high above its green flowery meadows. Further on, the mountains fall away to right and left round the plain of Rieti itself, which at this end lies green and treeless like the broad sea-flats of our south-east coast, and like them, rich in marsh and meadow-flowers. The time seems not far remote when the Lake of Velino, and the little tarns and narrow streams which still be-gem this portion of the plain, were but the deeper parts of one wide mountain lake. This watery past is again recalled by a wooded island, which, at the further end of the plain, rises landlocked from the persistent and unbroken level.

Francis' visits to this valley, and especially to the “loca” in the near neighbourhood of the city, are only too often connected with his sufferings. The sad little formula, *propter infirmitatem oculorum*,

<sup>1</sup> T Celano, *Legenda Antiqua*, Y. 1 (Rosedale's edition).

persistently opens the account of a visit to Rieti and its surroundings. For the ancient Roman city was famous for its eye doctor, whom Francis, by the influence of his friends Cardinal Ugolino and brother Elias, was several times persuaded to visit. Three of the five hermitages which sheltered the Franciscans in the Rieti district are set, according to Francis' constant choice, above the plain, in partial isolation under the surrounding mountain heights. The writer of the *Actus in Valle Reatina* has worked out an elaborate analogy between their position and the extremities of the cross ; but he would better have applied his scheme by making Greccio the base instead of the head, for it is in the north-west corner of the plain, separated from the other settlements by its whole expanse.

Greccio is reached the first in a circuit of the valley to the right from Marmore. It is set high up on the side of the mountain which separates this plain from the Nera valley, and, being thus on the direct road from Rome to Rieti, constantly sheltered Francis in his passage over the mountains. His first visit to the Castello of Greccio, the picturesque village perched on a hill-top close under the mountain side, a little to the south of the convent, is placed by one writer in 1217. His preaching converted the inhabitants from their vicious and irreligious life, whose irregularity made



them easy victims of the wolves which haunted the mountain thickets, and left their crops at the mercy of insect swarms ; the change wrought in them by Francis' earnestness provided them with a principle of life and freed them from the plagues with which Nature scourges her prodigals ; for it is, perhaps, permissible thus to interpret the miraculous disappearance of both, immediately after their conversion.

It was possibly after this event that Giovanni da Vellita, a worthy citizen of Greccio, attracted by Francis, as Orlando had been, asked permission to build him a settlement ; and the first cells, forming the basis of the present convent, were cut out of the mountain side, Francis' cell being remote from the others in an overhanging portion of rock.<sup>1</sup>

The mountain against which Greccio is built is barren and wild, save for the rich woods which cluster round the convent. It is no summer paradise like Lo Speco of Monte Pancrazio, for its unscreened front, built in the flat face of rock, receives the full southern glare ; but at the Christmas season, with which Franciscan students inevitably associate it, the Brothers would find it a delightful haven of sheltered sunshine. From the time of its foundation it formed one of their favourite haunts. From Greccio was dated that

<sup>1</sup> T. Celano, *Tractatus Secundus*, A. xxv.

masterpiece of biography, the Legend of the Three Companions.

The convent is approached from the road below by steep paths, through common-land and oak woods, and up the bed of half-dried torrents. It is less cramped than the Carceri, but in its original portions no less quaintly picturesque; here, as in almost all the mountain settlements, masonry seems to exist on sufferance of the unhewn rock, and as if conscious of its intrusion; for the rock still projects unreprieved into the low, winding passages, in bossy and shelving ledges, within which the Brothers are said to have made their beds.

Close to the little three-cornered piazza of entrance is a tiny chapel built subsequently to the celebration of the Nativity drama, and as a kind of shrine for the sacred spot where it was enacted. On a higher level, removed only by a few feet outside, and approached from within by a winding stair, is another and larger chapel, divided into two parts by a latticed screen. The ancient choir, which is at the end opposite to the altar, is thus shut off from the nave of the church. The screen is surmounted by a wooden crucifix, pendent from the roof. It is easy to detect a reminiscence of this chapel in Giotto's presentation of the "Presepio," in the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi. The choir of his church is on a larger and more

ambitious scale, and various architectural accessories are introduced ; but the rood-screen and pendent crucifix are there, and it may well be that his arrangement of the scene, as in many other instances of his architecture, is a variation of a clearly conceived original.<sup>1</sup>

In another chapel of the convent is preserved the pathetic and rather melancholy portrait of Francis, painted, it is said, by order of his friend, Giacobbe of Settesoli. It represents him stigmatised and wiping his eyes with a handkerchief, in extremity of woe. The figure, especially the ill-success of the feet and their imperfect perspective, betrays an early hand, though the face has clearly been repainted. Like Cimabue's pathetic and beautiful portrait, this aspect of Francis is perhaps the least truly characteristic of the Poverello, certainly that least shown to the world. It was, indeed, almost an axiom of his that a man must show a joyful face to his fellows, however great might be his private grief. He gave no sanction to the piety of a gloomy countenance. The mournful portrait has, however, a special place in the valley

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Giotto's authority was Bonaventura. This may account for his substitution of an interior for the natural surroundings, in which the drama was enacted. In Bonaventura the open-air mystery play has assumed something of the character of an ecclesiastical ceremony.

where Francis was so often driven to seek a cure for the weakness which his long and bitter weeping had induced.

At the further end of the building, and slightly isolated from it, little roofed porticoes mark the rocky cells and oratories of certain of the early Franciscans. From these deep recesses they could peer out across the valley. It was in one of them that John of Parma sheltered after his retirement from the Generalship of the Order. Whilst he lived there, Fra Salimbene relates, two wild birds, like big geese, used to come from the wood, and made their nest and laid their eggs and hatched their young under the sundial where he constantly studied, and allowed him to touch them without harm.

The well-known incident of the Christmas celebration at Greccio is related by Celano in the *Legenda Gregorii*.<sup>1</sup> Three years before his death, Francis was in the neighbourhood of Rieti at the Christmas season, and sent word to his friend Giovanni da Vellita expressing his desire to represent the scene of the Nativity, with its actual accessories, that it might thus be brought vividly before the minds of the people. He commissioned him to prepare the drama in a certain spot which he indicated to him, in the woods round the settle-

<sup>1</sup> Rosedale's edition, A. xxxi,

ment. The manger was filled with fodder, and an ox and ass were brought to play their part. The picture is a vivid one, even in the balanced, almost liturgic, periods of Celano. It has not, alas ! come down to us in the brief and dramatic narrative of the Three Companions. The brothers were summoned from the various neighbouring settlements to assist in the drama, and men and women brought torches and candles according to their means, till the woods were alive with lights, and the forest and rocks of the mountain side resounded with their glad singing. Then Francis read the Gospel for the day, and preached to the people, telling with simple eloquence of the birth of the poor King and of the humble city of Bethlehem. The very naming of Christ filled him with a joy so great that his tongue seemed to burn in a flame of ecstasy, and to one of those present, who had caught the infection of his rapture, the puppet in the manger seemed to respond to the caresses of the saint. Nothing is more characteristic of Francis than this losing of himself in a thing which he had planned for the quickening of others. It gives us a key to his overwhelming influence ; for nothing is so infectious as the whole-hearted participation of the giver in his gift. Nothing which Francis touched, or conceived as an idea, remained outside him. He identified himself with it by an

almost unparalleled absence of self-consciousness, and impressed his idea by a communication of enthusiasm which, through the most tortuous channels of narrative, still compels our allegiance. We can re-create this winter scene on the mountain-side, vocal with the joyful hymns of the little company, and its leafless trees illumined by the torches and flaring lights; while in the centre the chief actor, Francis, in an ecstasy of joy, lives again the scene he is enacting, and kneels, heedless of the creeping cold, between the ox and ass beside the manger, seeming to embrace the living child of Bethlehem. To no one has life been so constant and perfect a sacrament. The place where the manger stood was consecrated as a temple of God, and above it, as we have seen, an altar and church were built in honour of Francis, though the date of their erection is unknown.

In chapter 20 of the *Speculum*, Leo relates the celebration of another and less happy Christmas festival, at Greccio.<sup>1</sup> It appears that the brothers could not resist the hospitable impulse to make more sumptuous preparation for the visit of a Minister of the Order than for their daily guest

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Celano, *Tractatus Secundus*, A. xlv. "quodam die pasche, in heremo grecii." Sabatier points out that "pascha" was also applied to the Christmas festival, in which case the apparent contradiction between Celano and the *Spec. Perf.* is reconciled.

Lady Poverty, but laid the tables with "fair white cloths and vessels of glass. Coming down from his cell, blessed Francis saw the tables set upon a dais and carefully prepared.

"Then he went at once in secret and took the staff and cap of a poor man who had come to them that very day, and calling one of his companions in a low voice, went outside the gate of the colony without the knowledge of the brothers in the house. So his companion stayed inside near the gate, but the brothers in the meantime went in to dinner, as blessed Francis had directed the brothers not to wait for him when he did not come punctually at the dinner hour. And when he had stood a little while outside, he knocked at the gate, and his companion opened to him straightway, and coming with his cap behind his back and his staff in his hands, he went to the door of the house in which the brothers were eating, like a poor man and a pilgrim, and called, saying: 'For the love of the Lord God, give alms to this poor man, a pilgrim and infirm.' Now the Minister and the other brothers recognised him at once. And the Minister answered him: 'Brother, we are poor also, and since we are many, the alms which we have are necessary to us, but in the love of that Lord whom you named, come in, and we will give you of the alms which the Lord has given us.'



And when he had come in and was standing before the brothers' table, the Minister gave him the bowl from which he was eating and some bread likewise. And humbly receiving it he sat down near the fire, facing the brothers as they sat at table. And he sighed and said to the brothers : ' When I saw the table laid with elegance and distinction, I reflected that it was not the table of the poor religious who go daily from door to door for alms ; for it befits us, dear ones, even more than other religious to follow the example of Christ's humbleness and poverty, since we are called to this and have professed it before God and men. For this cause, as I sit here, I hardly feel a lesser brother ; for the feasts of the Lord and of the other saints are honoured more by poverty and want, through which the saints themselves gained heaven, than by elegance and excess, which keep the soul far from heaven.' And the brothers were ashamed at this, considering that he spoke pure truth. And some of them began to weep bitterly as they observed how he was sitting on the ground, and how pure and holy was his desire to correct them. For he used to warn the brothers that their meals should be so humble and fitting that men of the world might be edified thereby, and if any poor man were to come he might be invited by the brothers



and sit as an equal at their side, not the poor man on the ground and the brothers above.”<sup>1</sup>

One more incident is located by the *Speculum Perfectionis* at Greccio. The brothers had persuaded Francis against his will to sleep with a feather pillow on account of his weak eyes ; but his consent had not been whole-hearted : he allowed himself to brood over this concession to his weakness, till he came to believe himself the victim of a temptation of the devil. “When Francis was at prayer in the hermitage of Greccio, in the last cell beyond the big cell, one night he awoke his companion who was sleeping next door to him from his first sleep, and the companion got up and went to the door of the cell where blessed Francis was, and the saint said to him : ‘Brother, I have not been able to sleep to-night, nor stand upright to pray, for my head and my hair tremble violently, and I seem to be eating darnel bread.’ And when his companion had spoken compassionate words to him, blessed Francis said : ‘The fact is, I believe the devil is in this pillow which I have at my head.’” No persuasion availed ; Francis was con-

<sup>1</sup> Compare with this scrupulously honest account the characterless and inaccurate version of a Catholic writer, Mariani : “I religiosi avevano un poco più dell’ ordinario imbandita la mensa mercè divoti Benefattori . . . Entrò tutto lieto S. Francesco e seduto in terra, con giubilo mangiò alcuni pezzeti di pane,” etc.

vinced, and threw the pillow to his companion, who caught it in his right hand and swung it over his left shoulder. But the devil was not to be so easily dismissed; a kind of cramp seized the brother and held him motionless and speechless till Francis recalled him to himself, and he flung the pillow over his back. Leo's conclusion is characteristic. "When the brother returned, Francis said: 'This evening, when I was saying complines, I felt the devil come to my cell. From which I perceive that this devil is very cunning; for when he cannot hurt my soul, he tries to interfere with my bodily needs, so that I cannot sleep or stand upright to pray, and to hinder my devotions and my joy of heart so that I may on this account be led to complain of my infirmity.'"

FORTE COLOMBO, OR MONS RANERII.—Next to Greccio, in the circuit of the valley, still following the road which skirts the hills on the right, and passing below the mountain village of Contigliano, we reach the convent of Fonte Colombo. It is first seen to the right, half-hidden among trees, just before the last stretch of road which, bordered by trees and delightful river undergrowth, turns inwards to Rieti. It stands at the summit of a green hill, overlooking the city and the river's course down the plain. Greccio is

in sight in its wooded cleft to the north-west, and Monte Terminillo seems almost within touch, wearing its dazzling snow-robcs unsubdued, even in the fierce mid-May sunshine. From the road the convent is reached after a rough half-hour's climb, first up the clear, shallow stream which flows down a steep gorge from the Fonte, then winding upwards through the convent woods.

Much of the building at present occupied by the *frati* did not exist when Francis and his companions sheltered at Fonte Colombo. The curious little group of rock-set chambers which served as their oratory and cells are lower down, on the steep wooded hillside, almost completely hidden amongst the trees and overshadowed by a magnificent ilex. They hang above the narrow ravine down which the Fonte pours, looking out from their nest of foliage to the wooded hill across the stream. The seclusion is complete, and the silence of the oak woods in this land of nightingales is remarkable. It is traditionally explained by a story which does no more credit to the imagination than to the judgment of its author ; for it attributes the absence of birds to their dismissal by Francis on account of their disturbance of the Brothers' devotions.

A peculiar and pathetic interest attaches to the rude, rock-hewn cells and natural shelters of this hillside ; for it was here that the rule of 1223 was

written. Francis had been staying in Rome as the guest of Cardinal Leo, but he could get no rest there. The fears which always beset him when he had allowed his body any relaxation that might prove a stumbling-block to the brothers, took shape this time in demons who outwitted any attempt at sleep. He felt himself compelled to escape from a hospitality which so shackled him, and returned to Fonte Colombo.<sup>1</sup>

The author of the *Actus in Valle Reatina*, with his passion for Scriptural analogies, sees in the rule a fortunate antitype to the Tables of the Law. Francis, like another Moses, deposes Elias as his minister-general. To make the analogy perfect, Elias has to be "in bitterness of spirit" at the brothers' request for a lighter rule; the rule has to be lost and another written, as with the shattered tables of stone. How far this version represents the part played by Elias in this transaction, those can best judge who realise the bitterness of Leo's feelings against him as a subverter of his master's ideal. The writing of the rule was a concession which Francis felt to be a betrayal of his idea, and his instinct concerning it was right. It was wrung from his weakness, not his strength.

The overhanging rock is still shown where, while his friend strove in prayer in the narrow cell

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 67

near by, Leo waited in faithful and patient sympathy, the woodland silence around him broken only by a flitting night bird, and close beside him the deep agony of a human soul which he longed in vain to relieve.

Another pathetic incident is located here, but less grievous than the framing of the rule ; for it records Francis' triumph over bodily pain through an intensity of mental effort of which he seems to have been himself unconscious, attributing the virtue of his control to the temperate heat of brother Fire. The story of his cauterisation as related by Leo<sup>1</sup> is a masterpiece of dramatic narrative. The simple directness of the story, and utter absence of sensationalism, reveal only more clearly the sensitive shrinking of Francis and the fibre of his mental control. Every detail of the story is alive : Francis' desire to wait till Elias should arrive, and his final consent when the delay proved too long ; his pathetic address to brother Fire, and the flight of the Brothers as unable to bear the sight of his suffering : the doctor's amazement at his patient's motionless fortitude, and, not least touching, Leo's termination, where he accounts for the docility of the fire by recalling Francis' love and his relations with the elements and all living creatures. "Nor is it wonderful if fire and the

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 115.

other creatures at times obeyed him and revered him ; for we who were with him constantly saw that he was so considerate towards them and so greatly delighted in them, and that his spirit was moved with such pity and compassion for them, that he could not bear to see them rudely treated ; for he talked to them with inward and outward joy as if they were reasonable beings, and often at such a time he was rapt into God."

Another story of Francis' relations with the eye-doctor is also connected with Fonte Colombo.<sup>1</sup> It may fittingly be quoted, not only from its inherent charm, but from the light it throws on the poverty of these first Franciscan dwellings, and the recognition of Francis' claim to the hospitality of the neighbourhood. The eye-doctor had come out one day from Rieti to visit him, and after some talk was preparing to depart, when Francis, without proffering the invitation which the doctor's delicacy had led him often to refuse, bade one of the brothers give the doctor to eat of their best. His companions, whose standard of hospitality was framed on a more conventional pattern than that of Francis, demurred on account of the extreme spareness of their larder, perhaps with a slight feeling of annoyance that Francis should shame them before the doctor, who was rich, and who might without discomfort return

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 110.

the few miles which lay between them and the city. But Francis reproved them almost sharply, and the doctor declared himself ready to partake of their fare.

“So the brothers went and laid the table, and put on it with shame a bit of bread and a little wine and a few greens which were to serve for themselves. And when they had sat down at the mean little table and had begun to eat, lo, there was a knock at the door of the place ; and one of the brothers rose and went to open the door : and a woman was there who had brought a great jar full of beautiful bread and fish and crab patties and honey and eggs, which had been sent to Francis by a lady who lived in a village about seven miles from the place. When they saw these things the brothers and the doctor were full of wonder and gladness, reflecting on the holiness of S. Francis and ascribing it all to his merits ; and the doctor said to the brothers : My brothers, neither you, as you ought, nor we know the holiness of this man.”

In the later biographies, Francis' reproof of the Brothers for their hesitation is developed into an elaborate prophecy of what is here still treated as a fortunate accident.

The incident related in chapter 33 of the *Speculum Perfectionis* clearly occurred in one of the settlements close to Rieti, though the place is not named.



On one of his visits the doctor told Francis that a woman had come to him to be cured of eye-disease, who was so poor that he was obliged to pay her expenses himself. Francis at once turned to the guardian and said : " Brother Guardian, we must give back what is not ours." And he said : " What is this which is not ours ? " So he said : " That cloak we borrowed from the poor sick woman, we must give it back to her." And his guardian said to him : " Brother, do what seems best to you."

Then blessed Francis called with delight a spiritual man, a friend of his, and said to him : " Take this cloak and twelve rolls of bread as well, and go to the poor woman with weak eyes whom the doctor will show you, and say to her, ' A poor man whom you obliged with this cloak sends you thanks for the cloak you lent him ; take what is yours.' "

At first this tactful ruse had the effect of alarming the poor woman, who could not believe in the genuineness of so singular a message ; and even when she was persuaded to accept the cloak, she took the precaution to leave the city secretly by night, fearing lest her unknown benefactor should repent of his generosity.

RIETI.—In less than half an hour from the foot of Fonte Colombo we reach the city of Rieti, crossing



the wide full stream of the Velino just before its gates.

It is the sole city of this valley, and set in its extreme south-east corner within the sweep of the mountains: the slight elevation round which it is built enables it to command the valley, and makes its towers a landmark in every part. The mountains form its immediate background, Monte Terminillo towering above them all, and the meadows of its lower slopes reaching almost to the city boundaries. Outside the great walls of defence runs a wide and shady boulevard, and the proportions of the city within are spacious and dignified. Lofty palaces and houses recall its stately past, their plainest walls often adorned by some rich fragment of stone or brick design.

Francis was sure of a warm welcome at Rieti, whenever his infirmity drove him there; the bishop's palace was open to him, and other houses of distinction, but the strain on his strength was less in the little settlements of the Brothers, whose life was the expression of his thoughts, than in these houses of the great, where the maintenance of his own standard of life, in distinction from the life about him, involved an expenditure of energy and consideration which he could ill afford. The atmosphere of luxury was accustomed to breed demons of depression in his mind, as in the case

above quoted, when he was driven from Cardinal Leo's house in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

The Piazza of Rieti, like that of many another Umbrian city, is associated with at least one sermon of Francis. According to brother Leo,<sup>2</sup> it was on the piazza before the cathedral of Rieti that the bishop rose up after Francis' sermon and paid him a tribute which was particularly congenial to the saint, drawing a contrast between the holy men of note, who had adorned the church from the beginning, and "the poor, despised, and illiterate man Francis," who had now been raised up to illumine it. "And with these words the bishop came down from the place where he had been preaching and entered the cathedral. And Francis going up to him, bowed himself before him and threw himself at his feet and said: 'In truth, lord bishop, I tell you that no man ever did me so much honour when I was in the world as you have done me to-day; for other men say: This man is a saint, attributing the glory and holiness to me and not to the Creator, but you with great discernment have distinguished between what is precious and what is vile.'"

S. ELEUTERIO.—At Rieti the most southerly point is reached in our circuit of the plain, and we turn

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 45. Celano locates the incident at Terni.

our faces northwards along the road which at the cascade of Marmore branched to the left to encompass the small lake-valley and approach the city of Rieti along the eastern boundary of the plain. It is from this road that we reach the two last hermitages of the valley, S. Fabiano, more familiarly known from its situation as S. Maria della Foresta, and Poggio Bustone, both famous in Franciscan history. Scarcely beyond the limits of the city, in the place now occupied by the Campo Santo, is the hermitage mentioned in chapter 16 of the *Speculum Perfectionis* as "eremitorium Sancti Eleuterii contra<sup>1</sup> Reate." For an account of this I must rely on M. Sabatier's note given on page 34 of his edition of the *Speculum Perfectionis*.

"Cet ermitage se trouve sur un monticule à une demi-heure au N. de Rieti, un peu au dessus de la la petite église dédiée à S. Eleuthère,<sup>2</sup> consacrée par Innocent III., le 14 août 1198. Je pense que la vraie leçon est *contra Reate*, en face de Rieti, car de l'ermitage on voit en face de soi toute la ville dont on est séparé par un bas-fond. Ce mot de *contra* serait donc le signe que l'auteur de ces lignes a revu tout cela en écrivant, mais que les copistes, ne comprenant pas, ont voulu voir là le mot *contrada* ou *contrata*."

<sup>1</sup> In several MSS. the word "contra" is replaced by "de contrata." <sup>2</sup> Destroyed in recent alterations of the cemetery.

The incident<sup>1</sup> in connexion with which this note occurs, took place in the winter : "On account of the great cold, Francis lined his tunic and the tunic of his companion Roger with some bits of stuff. . . . And a little while afterwards, on returning from prayer, he said with great joy to his companion : 'It is for me to be the pattern and example of all the brothers, and thus, although my body has need of a lined tunic, yet I must consider the rest of my brothers to whom the same thing is needful, and they perhaps have not and cannot have it. Therefore I must needs consider them, so that I may suffer the same necessities as they too suffer ; that seeing this in me they may have strength to bear them in great patience.'"

The feeling of responsibility expressed here lay at the root of much apparently exaggerated asceticism in Francis. The joy with which he expressed his decision plainly shows that it did not spring from a morbid impulse to self-mortification. Any real attempt to understand the nature of this man brings increasing conviction that, like all who have profoundly meditated on their mission, he probably chose, at the expense of much which he would approve in other men, the directest, perhaps the only practicable, way of accomplishing it ; and it lay at the root of his conception that the lowest

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 16.



S. MARIA DELLA FORESTA



should feel his case was represented, and the special difficulties of his situation reconciled, in his model, with a bearing of patience and confident joy.

S. FABIANO, OR S. MARIA DELLA FORESTA.—The road on this eastern side of the valley takes a direct course through the plain, avoiding the projecting spurs of wooded hill which run down from the mountain boundary ; in consequence, the little settlements which are set amongst them cannot be reached without considerable deviation from the main road. The picturesque little convent of S. Fabiano, or S. Maria della Foresta (Our Lady of the Woods), is on the further side of a wooded hill, about three miles from the city. A rough road winds upwards round the hillside from the plain, till we step suddenly upon it from the woods, in the midst of a little plateau of grass and mossy boulders, somewhat below the level to which the road has brought us. The same woods extend beyond it, rising to form its background. If we come thus from Rieti, it is hidden from sight almost up to the very door ; but from the northern side it is seen from the plain, nestling in its grassy hollow midway up the hillside. The mountain village of Poggio Bustone is in sight to the north, across an intervening hill, close under the barren mountain side, and Monte Terminillo is seen up the narrow

valley to which the meadows slope below the convent terrace.

Close behind it on a vine-covered mound, made conspicuous by two sheltering stone-pines and one or two cypresses, is still to be seen the tiny wayside chapel of S. Fabiano. This, with the priest's hut beside it, were the only buildings when Francis used to visit the valley. It is a singularly reposeful spot, especially in the early morning, when the sunbeams shoot through the young chesnut woods behind, and the air is full of the quiet song of birds. S. Maria della Foresta and Fonte Colombo are the most gentle and sheltered in character of the Rieti settlements ; for Greccio, though surrounded by woods, is close against the mountain side, and its neighbourhood is wild as well as wooded. S. Maria della Foresta is on the lower slopes of the mountains, not in their high places, and is more in touch with lowland verdure than many of the Franciscan settlements.

It was here that the entertainment of Francis promised to cost so dear the old priest who took charge of the chapel. The saint was on his way from S. Damiano to Rieti,<sup>1</sup> in his usual quest of relief for the disease of his eyes, when his progress to the city was arrested by the great crowds which

<sup>1</sup> After that weary night of pain which bore so rare a fruit in the Canticle of the Sun. This detail is mentioned in the *Actus*.



rumour of his coming had drawn out to meet him. But Francis could not face this increased demand on his strength, which was already giving out after his long journey ; he decided to turn out of his course to the welcome shelter of S. Fabiano, on its quiet wooded hill.

But he had only a partial respite. The papal court was temporarily stationed at Rieti, and the thronging crowd of pompous dignitaries and common folk were too full of their own need to consider the mortal weakness of a saint ; the considerable walk did not deter them from thronging to visit him. Moreover, the little settlement supplied other than spiritual refreshment. Beside the chapel was the humble vineyard of the poor priest, as it may be seen to this day ; this vineyard was approached by a door from the cottage. Brother Leo says feelingly : "The grapes were ripe, and it was a very pleasant spot"; and Francis' visitors found it convenient to pass through this door so often that the prospects of the vintage seemed ruined, and the priest began to lament the loss of his income in no covert terms. Francis pointed out to him the uselessness of lamenting the harm that was already done, and bade him trust in God, promising to make good the damage if his ingathering fell short of an even larger amount than usual ; and, in fact, the subsequent vintage not only allayed his fears,

but exceeded all his hopes. In place of its customary thirteen measures, the vine yielded twenty. The later versions of this story form an instructive illustration of the development of an elaborate prophecy from a simple expression of faith.

POGGIO BUSTONE.—This is the last, and perhaps the most impressive, of the Franciscan "places" in our circuit of the valley. Its proximity to S. Maria della Foresta serves to emphasise the striking contrast between them: the one is as different from the other as the nest of an eagle from that of a woodland bird.

From the plateau of La Foresta, Poggio seems but a little distance, but in reality some miles lie between them; for the main road, itself some distance below La Foresta, goes out far into the plain before the Roman road to Poggio turns from it at right angles, to climb the steep slope to the village; and the apparently shorter way through the hamlet of S. Liberata, which straggles along the mountain side south of Poggio, involves a rough and tortuous climb on rocky tracks round the half-wooded shoulder which separates them.

Poggio is set high above the valley, immediately under the mountain. It is a sombre, almost forbidding little citadel, rising in steep, narrow, ill-paved streets, almost without a break from gate to



POGGIO BUSTONE

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gate. No tree relieves its greyness, and the mid-day sun blazes on its blank streets and on the steep mountain wall behind—stony and desolate, save for a low shrubby undergrowth, and a few spreading oak trees higher up round the cells used by Francis. These branches form a grateful shelter from the glare of the opposite slopes, and a pleasant frame to the plain and distant city.

This mountain village is distinct not only in position, but in character from others of the valley. Its inhabitants seem to have caught something of the wildness of their inhospitable mountain side. The arrival of a stranger, however insignificant, is enough to fill the tiny piazza with a crowd of kerchiefed, speculative heads, and to send the children streaming down the steep, paved street, a dirty insurgent crowd, ill-restrained by a timid elder.

Sometimes in the village streets an undaunted missionary is still seen, with ardent eyes full of love and joy, vividly recalling the poor preachers of seven centuries ago. The country people are little modified in essentials: they are still eager for a religion made vital by a personality, but its preacher must first know how to melt their frost of suspicious raillery. In an isolated village like Poggio Bustone there is no precedent of gentleness, no criticism to control the undisciplined

passions of the young, no opportunity of contact with a gentler humanity ; it is a relic of the past, which the mountain treasures in her bosom as a mother her wildest child.

The convent, now abandoned, is reached by a rocky path along the mountain, scarcely a quarter of a mile from the village gate. It is to the right of this path, and slightly below it, on the brink of a ravine ; a small plot of pasture land adjoins it, but it is distinct from most of the other Franciscan hermitages in the absence of surrounding woods.

It is said that Francis found a small deserted hermitage in existence on his first visit to Poggio, and, delighted by the wild loneliness of the spot, gathered the brothers by night and took a temporary possession of it. It proved no doubt too near the village for complete rest from the pious curiosity of the inhabitants. Francis' cell, higher up the mountain side, and commanding a far wider outlook over the valley, eludes observation from below, and its approach would make greater demands on the devotion of the curious. A rough track climbs to it up the face of the mountain, immediately opposite the convent, but is lost higher up among the stones and stunted plants. A stream of exquisite clearness and vigour bounds across the path soon after the ascent has begun :

the barren mountain could devise no sweeter welcome.

One of the cells connected with Francis is found not far above the convent; the other, specially noted as his, is close under the brow of the mountain. It was doubtless from this cell that Francis blessed the valley on his last visit to Rieti. It is a place well fitted by its position for such a leave-taking; for this embrasure of the mountains seems to enfold the valley, though not actually commanding its whole extent.

According to Celano, it was at Poggio<sup>1</sup> that the incident took place which is related in chapter 62 of the *Speculum Perfectionis*, when Francis prefaced his sermon to a great crowd with the confession that on account of his infirmity he had eaten food prepared with lard instead of oil during a fast. The confession might seem almost tiresome in its precision, but its reason is plain from the connexion in which Leo tells it. It lies not in the emphasis on diet, to which by nature Francis was indifferent, but in his constant dread lest his reputation for sanctity should rest on anything less than entire knowledge of his conduct in the most insignificant matters; he was almost morbidly restless in the fancied detection of an impure motive,<sup>2</sup> and felt impelled at once to confess it. Again, it was his

<sup>1</sup> Podium.

<sup>2</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 63.

keen realisation of the responsibilities of saintship which made him hail with such gratitude, as an echo of his own thought, the peasant's warning against hypocrisy.<sup>1</sup>

The plain immediately below Poggio is in strong contrast with the bare mountain above. An oak grove covers the lower slopes of the hillside reaching down to the fertile meadows of the plain. It is radiant with colour in the summer evenings, when the level light pierces the close ranks of corn which press tall and bright round its ancient tree-trunks. Lower, in the actual level, a still, transparent stream winds beside the road, bordered by irises and other water-flats, and paved with flowing weeds. Gulls and river birds haunt its reedy banks. The road soon leaves the plain to mount the hills which lie between it and the lake of Piediluco, pressing in from the mountains at this northern end, where the Velino flows in narrowing channel and growing swiftness to its falls.

<sup>1</sup> On his first journey to La Verna.



## THE MARCHES

THE Legend of the Three Companions contains a vivid little notice of Francis' first journey to the Marches, and the spirit in which it was accomplished. It was undertaken with Giles immediately after the latter had joined him in the very early days of the Order. "Now, going into the Marches, they rejoiced exceedingly in the Lord ; and the holy man, singing in French and in a loud and clear voice praising God, blessed and glorified the goodness of the Most High."

Few authentic records have come down to us of Francis' journeys in the Marches, and comparatively few local associations with his memory or that of his followers. There are many convents which claim him as their founder ; several which, through association with him, attach peculiar sanctity to some portion of their structure. But local traditions have fallen so far into oblivion that they can no more be roused to throw fresh light on the less familiar pages of Franciscan biography.

The Marches were, in fact, rather a land of passage than a resting-place of Francis. They were the scene of his first missionary journey and

of many subsequent ones. Through their gates he crossed into the new domain, whose conquest lay always near his heart; for along their coast lie the seaports for the Holy Land and for all the East.

But the silence of history on Francis' relations with this province does not argue that his labours were barren or bore little fruit. Nowhere did his ideas find more ready acceptance or were held with greater tenacity during the years of persecution which followed close upon his death. It is sufficient to recall the names of Angelo Clareno da Cingoli and Conrad of Offida, for memory of the passionate and pathetic fidelity with which the March Brothers adhered to his profoundly simple ideal, in the face of a relentless and overbearing majority. "The Province of the March of Ancona was of old adorned, as the sky with stars, with holy brothers of good example, who, like the luminaries of heaven, have illumined and adorned the Order of S. Francis and the world by example and doctrine."<sup>1</sup>

This was no idle vaunt of one who desired to glorify his own province at the expense of truth. The whole collection of the *Fioretti* is a proof of the vitality and enthusiasm with which the memory of Francis' life and doctrine was preserved

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xlii.

and rekindled by these visionaries of the Marches. We know little about them as individuals ; indeed, we find it hard to distinguish one star from another in magnitude, in the series of visions and wonders related to their honour in the *Fioretti*. The monotony of these visions, while it may weary, need not surprise us, nor make us call in question their subjective reality. They are quite different in spirit from mechanical repetitions of a conventional pattern vision. They express, as far as the simple yet mystic brothers were able, their ideal of spiritual insight. Their emotional nature was quickened by contact with the beauty of Francis' personality and teaching, and the inspiration which they drew from Nature tended to strengthen the sole manifestation of ecstasy and sanctity familiar to and coveted by them. We know at least that poets and students, noble youths and little children, they were one and all moved by a keen and sustained purpose to conform their life to the pattern revealed to them by the ardent Umbrian pilgrim. They had not all the privilege of close and renewed contact, which many less faithful of his followers enjoyed ; but the impulse he had given to their spiritual aspirations was not dulled by absence. It quickened the thirst for mystic union with the personal Godhead that seems to have been inherent in their passionately loving nature ; it gave them an assured centre

of activity, without which their ecstasies might have been dissipated in visionary excess, refusing the union with life, of which valiant offspring might be born to it.

The Marches were in a peculiar sense the Franciscan province. Wherever Francis went within their borders he seems to have been received with joy. We nowhere hear that he encountered the criticism under guise of friendship, which, while pretending to bestow a more fruitful guidance of energy, attempted to bind his genius in the winding-sheet of formalism.

The removal of the Marches from the main line of traffic with Rome may have kept the people free from too exclusive a reverence for ecclesiastical precedents and methods, and have enabled them to enter more fully, and without ulterior scruples, into the religious reforms of the Umbrian enthusiast. To this we must add a childlike and unanalytic simplicity of mind, such as we find in isolated cases among his other followers, as in Brother Juniper or Brother John, but which in the Marches seems to have been a common characteristic. His followers there maintained the tradition of his teaching with a literalness which, by a curious inversion, came soon to be regarded as heresy, or at least as dissent. No reformer was ever less a dissenter than S. Francis. He was not even con-

sciously a reformer ; but there were undeniably certain elements in his teaching which, in matters of discipline rather than in matters of doctrine, might have brought him into collision with the ecclesiastical forces, had he given obedience a less exalted place among the virtues.

As it was, contact with Francis disarmed his critics. They fell down before the child in him, and gave their ear to the poet whose eloquence completed the conquest. They were puzzled by this strange compound of filial submission and inspired obstinacy.

But the Zelanti, who fought so valiant a fight in the Marches, were less composite. The tone of dissent, which, from a living and harmonious personality of peculiar charm, eluded the suspicions of the orthodox, was developed by them into a note too pronounced to be overlooked. The personality was gone which successfully linked unquestioning reverence for ecclesiastical precedent with a serene freedom of interpretation—the widest catholicity with a rule of the completest definition—and it was inevitable that the various contradictory elements should expand independently according to the bias of the mind which laid hold on them.

On the one hand, we find the great, and for many generations valuable, Franciscan foundations

initiated by Elias ; on the other, the Strict Observance, the Zoccolanti and the Zelanti, of whom, in the Marches, Angelo Clarenò was the chief representative.

It is remarkable that in the March of Fermo, divided by a twofold barrier of mountains from Central Italy, and unbroken by railways, the convents are almost universally converted into municipal buildings, and the general attitude of the people seems one of unusual indifference towards local saintship.<sup>1</sup>

Is it perhaps possible that what won Francis his first following in the Marches is now responsible for the neglect which has overtaken his memory ? The main stream of civilisation has made little impression in this remote district, so that a continuity of characteristics is at least arguable : it may well be that the simplicity of mind which was ready to accept Francis literally, wearied of a hero who had become transformed into an emasculated calendar saint. These March dwellers never came in contact with Franciscanism as a repository of learning, nor would they have been interested in it. Gradually such convents as had developed

<sup>1</sup> This attitude seemed accurately voiced in the reply I received from an inhabitant of Penna, S. Giovanni, who was not of sufficiently exalted station to make his scepticism orthodox. *Non m'interessano molto i santi.*

from the original rude shelters have fallen into incompetence and finally disuse, or have been suppressed without arousing sufficient interest in individuals for their revival: no notable shrine exists to attract pilgrims from the outside world,<sup>1</sup> thus no commercial incentive has been given to the revival of local hero-worship.

The isolation of the Marches has certainly contributed to their present interest. Though the people have little feeling for an effete tradition, related to no tangible reality, they are singularly conservative of ancient rites and an elaborate ceremonial in the sequent events of the year and of a man's life, such as seed-sowing, harvest, baptism, or marriage. This pleasurable and picturesque interest in the ordinary affairs of life is characteristic of a people of artistic nature, but without great intellectual development. Leopardi, we know, felt keenly the lack of intellectual sympathy, or even reverence in the atmosphere which surrounded him—

“*intra una gente  
Zotica, vil, cui nomi strani, e spesso  
Argomento di riso e di trastullo  
Sona dottrina e saper.*”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I must be understood to refer only to the March of Fermo. The Santa Casa at Loreto, in the March of Ancona, is, of course, one of the most famous shrines of the Catholic church.

<sup>2</sup> Among a rude, base folk, to whom new names, and often learning and knowledge, are matter of laughter and jest.



The standpoint of which Leopardi complains is not peculiar to the Marches ; indeed, the attitude of suspicion towards what is foreign and unfamiliar is less marked here than often elsewhere. The general feeling of the people towards the foreigner is that of kindly curiosity, mingled with a completely unceremonious acceptance of him as of kin with themselves. If the March people of seven centuries since were in spirit one with those of to-day, their nature was such as to prepare them for an unreserved welcome of Francis, whose genius pre-eminently lay in a poetic pictorialisation of the facts of daily life.

It is easy to picture the joy with which he must have passed through this country on his first missionary journey. His faith and energies were still unimpaired by disappointments and prolonged physical pain or debility. He had not yet come into collision with misunderstanding and suspicion from amongst those who professed to follow him : they were all full of youthful ardour and the joyful independence of freedom from possessions. And now when Francis went out with Giles, one of his most refreshing and congenial companions, all the old problems and questionings seemed for the time set at rest, and the whole world to spring to his embrace.

There is always a peculiar and mysterious joy in



the unexplored, when wonder is ever awake ; and the journey over the Apennines marks a real passage into a new world : the geographical division is no arbitrary one, but denotes a real organic change, which is felt in wide-sweeping spaces and free expanse even before the Sibillines are crossed—the last barrier from the sea.

It is said that Francis pronounced a special blessing on Varano, a castle of ancient note overlooking the Chienti river. At this point of the valley, dividing the last outposts of the two mountain ranges, the eastern wall of Umbria and the western wall of the Marches, it is easy to distinguish their character—the last offspring of the Apennine brood, cast in round and massive mould, and the Sibillines springing up to the sky in rugged spires and pyramids of agile, shadowy rock, breaking away in the deep hollows into precipitous ravines beneath an arching rocky eave. It is easy to believe that the blessing was given, for the position of Varano is of exceptional beauty, the great peaked rock which supports it standing at the eastern extremity of the long spur of hill which runs down from Camerino to the Chienti valley.

Only the shell of the old fabric now remains, roofed by sky and framing the light with its hollow walls. It seems a place worthy of blessing when the sun first greets it, rising above the great sleep-

ing forms of the Sibillines, their rocky features still buried in dark shadow, and at their feet the radiantly clear stream of the Chienti. There is an exquisite freshness and freedom in the air of the Marches, which never quite deserts them in the summer noon, and which is intoxicating in the very early morning when every traveller should be afoot. For in the first few hours after the dawn, colour is really alive, springing to welcome the light, its genius. Later, through the long shadowless hours, it loses its wings and falls a slave to the sun's full-blown tyranny.

In the *Fioretti*, chapter liii., we read that near the Convent of Mogliano, John of La Verna had a vision of so great sweetness in the meadows before the dawn that his speech was rapt from him, and the brothers waited round in vain for the celebration of mass which it was his duty to sing. There is a peculiar significance in this specification of the hour of his vision. No one who has been among the meadows of the Marches, when the air is still and expectant of the dawn, can wonder that these brothers were visionaries. The dewy slopes, which spring from the deep ravines on every side, are growing into light, while the lower hollows still lie in shadow. The clover reaches down like strips of moorland heath into the very crevices of the rocky valleys, and the tall corn waves over the

slopes in speared phalanx of silvery green—or gold, as in the season of John's vision.

On every side are seen great waving lines of hill and valley, bounded only by the Sibillines, which peer from the morning haze in snowy mystery, and by the sea, visible in dim horizon even from the western mountain boundary. Across the wide expanse of the Marches beckons the sea, and throughout their whole extent, sight or feeling of it is never absent. The ebb and flow of the land gives to the Marches a sea-feeling which is, perhaps, the root of their peculiar charm. They seem to have been fashioned in its image; the stable land has learnt its motions, and reflects them in the flowing waves of hill which break across the plain, their crests bestridden by little cities—the “paesi,” to which, in English, we have no equivalent in name or reality. All these cities of the Marches seem closely related one to the other, holding out hands from their hill-tops; there is no hiding or lurking in corners; all are within view from any high point. The long ridges bear in their centre and on their branching curves several “paesi” at small distance from one another, while the wide, deep spaces of intervening valley are often without a single dwelling.

Long as the road may seem, it is small economy of time to penetrate into these ravines. Their depths are often hidden by a projecting hillside,

but from the fertile waving meadows of clover and corn they fall suddenly deep down between grand rocky walls to the base of the plain, where in each ravine a tiny mountain stream trickles down to join the main rivers on their tortuous passage between the great ridges to the sea. The valleys, which lie within these outspread arms of earth, are of peculiarly wild and rugged beauty, but never desolate or sombre, the sober grey of their noble cliffs forming a fine foundation to the rich warm slopes of crimson and bloomy green which crown them. There is no tedium in these valleys; scarcely a space of level ground. The land is never "finished and finite," but always in motion like the sea, with a motion not of unrest but of winged stability.

The spurs of hill, which from the eastern boundary branch out across the Marches, tend all towards the sea. From each a gleam of sunlight will reveal some distant bay, set like a pearl in the encircling coast, and the salt breezes carry freshness even in the midday. The sea is the genius of the Marches, not a mere element in their landscape; and, till we have come to know this genius, we cannot understand or define the mystery of their charm. It is not without significance that the ports for the East lay along these shores. A new horizon was given to the dwellers in the Marches; there must have grown into them a

sense of onward movement which they could no more withstand than explain, and this enthusiasm and vitality, this contact with the "springing To Be," must have communicated itself to those who, with religious zeal and thirst for the unexplored, crossed the double wall of mountains which separates the Marches from Central Italy and entered on this last piece of their land journey.

Francis, too, on his passage to the East, must have recaptured something of the joy with which the Marches inspired him on his first journey. Waiting in Ancona, he must often have rejoiced in this domain of his brother Water. Much of the old town still exists round the harbour, and at the water's edge, among the fleets of vivid sails and naked masts clothed in thin-meshed nets, where the boats rock at anchor, the spacious new piazzas and modern streets seem a thing remote; and the sombre-frocked brothers, with their grey clouts and radiant faces, move once more on the busy quay among a motley crowd of brilliant colouring and diverse tongues, earning bread as their ingenuity suggested, for their few days' sojourn. It was here that Giles, adept in methods of bread-winning, and prodigal of service beyond his hire, set himself to make and sell rush baskets and bore the dead to burial, always for the same wage of bread for himself and his companion. "And when this was

lacking to him, he turned again to the table of Jesus Christ, asking bread from door to door."

We have no record of Francis in the ancient seaport, but we may be sure that the cliff-solitude above it, no less than the harbour itself, was well known to him. Before the busy traffic of the day he must sometimes have climbed there in the hour when morning is stealing over the great expanse of water, and across the dancing sunpath a flock of fairy sails move imperceptibly as in a dream. All seems visionary in this half-light of dawn, which holds in its gift the land of promise far beyond the furthest flood-brim.

The long stretch of shelving cliff to the south of Ancona is a wild seclusion of wonderful beauty. On the south the bay is bounded by Monte Cornero, rising abruptly from the sea; the foreground cliffs are covered with springy turf, and in the hollows grow tall reeds and sparse ginestra. Far below, the sea breaks on the narrow fringe of shingle. The beauty of this space of down, swung between the Ancona cliff and the lofty slopes of Cornero, is enhanced by the rarity of such highlands on this coast. Further south, the spurs of hill which run towards the Adriatic end abruptly above a broad space of flat, reedy beach, more like the shores of an inland sea.

The road which leads south from Ancona to

Sirolo passes over the western slopes of Monte Cornero, above a deep and beautiful valley. In a misty dawn, the half-veiled phantom mountain towers mysteriously above it, and below it is outspread a swaying sea of cloud, from which the last hilly outposts of the Marches rise like spectral islands, washed by the unsubstantial waves.

The convent of Sirolo must have been one of the most beautiful in situation of all the Franciscan dwellings. The tower, which alone remains of it, is incorporated into a palazzo ; the dark trees of its garden run to the edge of the steep cliff—nothing else between it and the sea. It marks the limit between Sirolo and Numana, which stream in an almost uninterrupted line of white cottages down the southern slopes of Cornero to the shore, where, according to report, once stood the ancient city of Numana, long since engulfed by the sea. The low, whitewashed buildings resemble an English fishing village rather than an Italian town, but the intensity of colouring, the deep foliage mingling with their dazzling whiteness, and the marvellously vivid blue of the sea below, is too distinctively southern to continue the deception. A break-water or rude pier, formed from huge blocks of snowy stone, is hung out into the sea like a pendent gem from the sparkling crescent of the little town.



Further south, in the Marches of Ascoli, the coast has a different aspect. The little fishing town of S. Giorgio, seaport of Fermo, lies outspread in straight, grey lines on the flat shore. Slopes of corn and clover, and narrow valleys, poplar-edged, come down to the very beach, and the sea washes silently round soft curving lines of sand. The town lies in blank, expressionless heat during the long summer days, but in the breezy shade of a tiny grove of oak and pine on the castle height, one may lie looking out over the wonderful expanse, shading from clear chrysophrase into blue and passing in the distance into deepest hyacinth-purple.

It is not without significance that the visions of the March Brothers were framed almost without exception in a marvellous outpouring of light. The constant insistence on light is, indeed, so remarkable that one is tempted to connect this miraculous illumination with the atmospheric phenomena, which, throughout the Marches, but especially on the sea-line, are of peculiar beauty and distinctness. It may well be that these natural splendours, becoming inwoven in their meditations, assumed for them the form of a mysterious and divine apparition.

Sometimes throughout the June nights, when thunder has been brooding upon the land, the horizon cloud-banks are lit by unceasing lightning-



flashes of varying brightness, revealing their majestic fabric, and at times streaming across to the dim sea expanse ; while among their soft momentary gleams bursts intermittently a piercing golden sickle of light, and the fire-flies in passionate dance among the tamarisk and willows on the shore, play their part in the fantastic illumination.

This shore is uniquely favoured in situation for the changing seasons of an early summer day. The coastline bends north of east, so that the afterglow of sunset falls over the sea, which holds its brightness till moonrise. One night of May passed on this shore is a living memory. With evening the fishing-boats returned, driving in scattered groups towards the shore. They sailed in pairs, a motley show of colour, as the low sunrays lit their gorgeous sails, rich in fantastic and varied design. Two bore the circles of a peacock's wing in red and white on yellow ground ; on another pair were set the emblems of the Passion, in a ground ruddy as a robin's breast, and winged with brown. Two more like pirate-boats bore white flecks and crescents of red. Weather had softened and blent the colours into warm harmonies worthier of far richer fabric than their coarse sailcloth. This is the day's prime for the fisherfolk ; the "pescheria" is their forum and piazza, and long after twilight had fallen on the shore the chattering and chaffering con-

tinued, till they settled for the few hours of night which their sea-traffic allows. There was a pause before the moon's coming, when darkness threatened to overpower the twilight, and the long line of fishing-boats, which from sunset to dawn rock in their moorings along the water's edge, slumbering after their vivid display, were scarcely discernible against the dim ocean ; then they slowly crept into distinctness as the silvering sea proclaimed the moon's approach.

The full moon of May, rising dusky-red through the warm horizon-haze, threw a narrow path of tremulous gold across from sky to earth ; as she climbed into a remoter, paler height, the path's sure track was broken, but the eye was led abroad to wider spaces on the dim receding horizon. Then the already silvered path was transformed once more, spreading a broad quivering wing into the distance, and rolling with the waves in multiform curves on the shore, while the thin-meshed fishing nets, outhung on the masts, showed like the "restless gossamers" of the Spectre Bark.

As night grew into morning, sleepy figures crept down the beach, and the boats put off in the early dawn when the sea was passing from quiet silver-grey into translucent blue, reflecting rosy bars of light from the sun's vanguard. He came up a strange red oblong ball just opposite the shore,

supported, where he touched the sea-brim, on the inverted curve of his own image in the water. And as he rose full-circle, the spell of night was broken, and her mysteries took flight before the scrutiny of day.

LO SPERIMENTO.—The ancient city of Camerino was the first important halting-place of travellers from Umbria to the Marches. It is unusually exalted above the surrounding country, even in this land of mountain-built citadels; but the impression of its great height is lost in part by the shape of its hill and the extension of the city, which lies outstretched along its summit like a crouching dragon on guard over the wide country it surveys, its head the formidable castle, which from some points seems almost to comprise the city. The situation is one of remarkable beauty. Near at hand are the last outposts of the Apennines, unmistakable in their rounded sweeping outline to the north-west. A few mountains of the Vicino range cross them in the wide distance, and south-east lie the snowy Sibillines. Camerino is still outside the main district of the Marches; it peers out into it only where Vicino and the Sibillines break apart, leaving a low gap between them.

The now deserted convent of Lo Sperimento is

about two kilometres to the north-west of the city, on a hill called Agnano or Montesanto, which is reached through secluded lanes, unusual in Italy, hedged with steep grassy banks and wreathing honeysuckle, which in unrivalled profusion borders every path of the lowlands round Camerino. The road descends almost perpendicularly to the bed of a stream edged with rustling poplars, then rises with equal abruptness to the wood which half-surrounds the convent. The building, now partly in decay, is set as usual rather under cover of the hill, as if nestling against it; behind it a little grassy upland rises to the wood. There is nothing remarkable about this little convent, but its position is one of quiet loveliness, looking out across the waving lines of low hills to the far mountain horizon.

Tradition connects this convent's somewhat curious name with the circumstances of its gift.<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of Camerino, anxious to test the fidelity of Francis' followers to their profession of poverty, gave them this little convent, which they named *Lo Sperimento* (the Experiment), thus suggesting the provisional character of its tenure. Satisfied, it would seem, with this first experiment, the inhabitants before long built another

<sup>1</sup> Padre Mariotti, *I Primordi dell' Ordine Minoritico nelle Marche*, p. 95.

convent for the brothers, dedicated to S. Peter, within the south wall of the city, and in 1245, when Crescenzo da Jesi was General of the Order, a yet larger one facing west. This last convent gradually became the centre of the Franciscans in Camerino,<sup>1</sup> though, till the last Suppression, a few brothers remained faithful to Lo Sperimento.

The original convent of the Clarices at Camerino, standing just outside the north-west gate of the city, was founded by Battista Varani, one of the most attractive figures of the Franciscan Order. She belonged to the noble family whose ruined stronghold still stands a few miles east of Camerino, and she was one of the most brilliant and accomplished scholars of her day. She was born at Camerino in 1458, and fell early under the influence of the earnest, heart-searching eloquence of one of the March Brothers; but though she resisted her father's schemes for a brilliant and influential marriage, it was long before her religious enthusiasm became the sole absorbing reality of her being, a principle of unity among hitherto conflicting, unfocussed aims. When her father saw that her will was firmly set upon the religious life, he hoped to compound with her piety by settling on her the

<sup>1</sup> It was at Camerino that John of Parma died on his way to Greece. His robed skeleton is still preserved and displayed in the Duomo.

revenues of the convent which he founded on her behalf at Camerino. But Battista, while accepting his gift of the convent, of which she became the first abbess, would only do so in accordance with the Franciscan rule of poverty.

Her vigorous and impressive personality found scope henceforth, not only in the administration of the convent under her immediate control, but also in literary works of rare insight and originality. Her meditations and letters of counsel to both men and women are remarkable for independence of thought, for striking spirituality, and vividly pictorial language. Peter of Mogliano, one of the most active Provincials of the Marches, was Battista's close friend and counsellor. She died in 1527, and was buried in the church of her own convent at Camerino.<sup>1</sup>

MUCCIA.—The village of Muccia lies at the foot of the Apennines, to the south of Camerino, only a few miles from the source of the Chienti, which flows round the remnant of the ancient castle wall. It is possible to trace the original extent of the "castello," of which four towers are still visible, marking the ancient corners of the building. Three

<sup>1</sup> For a fuller life of Battista and quotation of her writings, see Père Léon's *Auréole Séraphique*.

other towers have been destroyed. The main tower now forms the campanile of the church, which encloses the original chapel of the castello, its entrance from the ducal palace being still traceable. The other old buildings of the once stately stronghold are imbedded among the tall but humble dwellings of the "paese." This village was the home of brother Roger,<sup>1</sup> a young student of noble birth, who whilst at the University of Bologna was moved by Francis' eloquence to join him. He seems to have persevered in his habits of reflection, and to have written various treatises for the guidance of the Brothers. Tradition adds that he was entrusted by Francis with various instructions for their government.<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps based on the second chapter of the *Speculum Perfectionis*, where Francis makes plain to Roger his will concerning the possessions of the Brothers, "That no brother shall have any garment save as our rule allows, with girdle and drawers." Another recorded visit of Roger to S. Francis gives an instance of the tender tactfulness of the master in meeting the difficulties of his disciples. Roger had fallen a prey to depression, under which he gave way to the belief that divine help had been finally withdrawn from him. He resolved to make Francis' bearing to-

<sup>1</sup> Rizerio seems to be convertible with Rogerio.

<sup>2</sup> *Vita del B. Rizerio dalla Muccia.* Padre Filippo Camerini.



wards himself the test of this belief, and journeyed to Assisi, where Francis was lying ill in the Episcopal Palace. Sensitive at once to his follower's need for human sympathy, Francis received him with exaggerated expressions of his own appreciation. "Rising from his bed directly he approached, he embraced him tenderly, and saluted him with a kiss of peace, saying to him: 'My dearest son, brother Roger, I assure thee that thou art loved and esteemed by me more than all the brothers who are in the world.'" As Francis had rightly estimated, this positive assurance of his personal love and esteem was the method best calculated to restore confidence to one who was overcome by a sense of his sin, an admirable and healing balm to severe self-analysis.

Roger appears to have retired later to a little hermitage in the wooded hills round La Muccia, and to have remained there with one companion till his death.

PONTE DELLA TRAVE.—A few miles distant from La Muccia, following the course of the Chienti, which has now grown to a full stream flowing between grassy, willowed banks, stands the convent of Ponte della Trave, originally called Trave Bonanti, which Wadding states to have been founded by Francis in 1215. The road turns to



the right between a cluster of porticoed houses—till recently a posting-station—crosses the old bridge, and winds a short distance between meadows to the convent, now used as a farm and storage place for fodder. “In the thirteenth century this district was populated and flourishing, chiefly owing to the neighbourhood of two castles, Pievebovigliana and Giove, the last reliable bulwark of the Ghibellines, who were favoured and protected by its lords, the Baschi.”<sup>1</sup> The old chapel still stands, though its interior has been sadly renovated. The precincts of the convent have been considerably transformed since Francis’ day ; indeed, it is probable that none of the rude structure which he would have sanctioned now remains. Till the suppression under Napoleon I. the convent was inhabited by the Conventual Brothers Minor.

From this point the Sibillines are already in sight, and it is only a few miles further down that the Chienti rushes with true mountain vigour beneath the grand rocky pedestal of the ruined Castello di Varano.

Ponte della Trave numbered among its inhabitants Brother Roger of Muccia and Bentivoglio of Sanseverino, whose athletic feat is recorded with praise in chapter xlii. of the *Fioretti*.

<sup>1</sup> *Devote Memorie intorno all’immagine dal. S. Crocifisso . . . di Pontelatrive.* Camerino, tip. Succ., Borgorelli, 1893.

“Once when Brother Bentivoglio was dwelling alone at Trave Bonanti, looking after a leper and waiting on him, he was ordered by his superior to depart thence and go to another place, which was fifteen miles distant ; and not wishing to abandon the leper, in the warmth of his love he lifted him up and placed him on his shoulder, and carried him from dawn to sunrise the whole distance of fifteen miles to the place whither he had been sent, which is called Monte Vicino ;<sup>1</sup> now if he had been an eagle he could not have flown that distance in so short a time, and all the country-side was filled with wonder and amazement.”

SAN SEVERINO.—The birthplace of Bentivoglio, and possibly also of Pacifico, the King of Verse, who was crowned for his poems while *in sæculo*, was built from the ruins of the ancient city of Settem-peda. It lies between Camerino and Macerata, and unlike most of the March cities, is set in the plain immediately below the great castle-hill, built round the spacious arcade or market-place somewhat in the form of an amphitheatre.

The tall campanile now stands as sole relic of the ancient castle, on a grassy mound at the sum-

<sup>1</sup> Fifteen miles is a very low estimate of the distance between Ponte della Trave and Monte Vicino, the highest mountain of the Vicino range.

mit of the keep, in solitary guard of the narrow pass through which the Potenza flows down from the Vicino mountains, that encircle the city to the north-west.

Several convents still exist in this upper portion of the town known as the Castello, one inhabited by Benedictine nuns, another by Clarices. But the convent of most ancient date is on the hill known as Colpersito, overlooked by the castle rock ; it is now inhabited by Cappuccini, but when S. Francis visited the city it was the home of some Sisters who had banded themselves together to observe the rule of S. Clare—the first settlement of Clarices in the Marches. It was here that Pacifico was filled with admiration for S. Francis, and prayed to be admitted into the Order.

The worldliness of Pacifico before his conversion is perhaps overstated by the pious chroniclers, but he was evidently a troubadour and famous love-poet. "He was called the King of Verses, for he was first among the love-poets, and had so highly exalted the glory of this world that he had been crowned with great pomp by the Emperor. . . . Now by divine Providence, S. Francis and he came together at a convent of poor nuns, for the Saint had come thither with his companions to visit his children, and he had come with many of his comrades to see some kinswoman.

“Now, the hand of the Lord being upon him, he saw with his bodily eyes two flaming swords set crosswise upon S. Francis, one of which reached from his head to his feet, the other from hand to hand across his breast. He had not before known S. Francis, but after so great a miracle he at once recognised him. And being filled at once with amazement at the sight, he began to meditate on amendment at some future time. But the first time the blessed father preached to the people, he turned against this man the sword of the Word of God ; then taking him apart, he talked gently with him of worldly vanity and contempt of earthly things, and finally he pierced his heart with warnings of divine judgment. And he replied at once : ‘What need have we of more words ? Let us come to deeds. Take me from men and give me up to the most high Emperor.’ And the day following the Saint clothed him in the habit of the Order, and named him Brother Peaceful, since he had been led back to the peace of God.

“And in proportion as the crowd of his vain companions had before been great, so much the greater was the number of those who were edified by his conversion. Brother Pacifico, rejoicing in the companionship of the blessed father, began to feel joys which he had never tasted before. For it was repeatedly granted him to see what was veiled

from others ; for after a little while he saw a great sign, TAU, on the forehead of S. Francis, shining with beautiful circles of diverse colours as of a peacock.”<sup>1</sup>

It will be remembered that it was brother Pacifico, chief among the Lord’s Minstrels (*foculatores Domini*), on whom Francis relied to make known to the people his Canticle of the Sun.<sup>2</sup>

It was to the convent of Colpersito that S. Francis took a lamb he had rescued from the market of Osimo, leaving it in charge of the Sisters, who tended it with great affection, and made of its wool a tunic, which they sent to S. Francis on the occasion of a general assembly at the Portiuncula.

TREJA.—The long, narrow town of Treja faces east and west, on a steep height immediately above the Potenza valley, midway between Cingoli and S. Severino.

It forms almost a hoop on the hillside, and the

<sup>1</sup> Celano, *Legenda Antiqua*, M. iiij. (Rosedale).

<sup>2</sup> In the seventeenth century, S. Severino was the birthplace of another Pacifico, a descendant of the sculptor Dominico Divini who carved the stalls in the Upper Church at Assisi, and of Eustace Divini, the astronomer. Pacifico entered the Order at seventeen, and became a priest. He was learned in philosophy and theology, but devoted his life to preaching among the poor of the hill-villages round Forano, where he was established. At thirty-five, ill health obliged him to give up preaching, and the remaining twenty years of his life were spent in retirement at Forano.

sea wind plays round it, rushing with pent-up energy down the narrow curving street and across the small piazza ; below it is outspread the whole district of the Macerata Marches bounded by the sea. In this part the country is more mountainous in character and less thickly populated than in the Marches of Ascoli. The towns lie on single heights, rather than on long continuous ridges, and are thus more isolated. There is a fine sense of moorland wildness around them.

Portions of the ancient wall which once formed the precincts of the Roman city of Trajana, and rude masses of masonry, are still to be seen in the neighbourhood of S. Crocifisso, a convent on an eminence to the west of the town. The convent chapel preserves a crucifix, now restored beyond recognition, which is said to have been found among the ruins of Trajana. The convent is plainly of ancient foundation, but nothing is known by monks or citizens as to its establishment.

Treja, formerly known as Montecchio (Monticulum), was the home of the brother Peter, whose colloquy with the Archangel Michael is related in chapter xlii. of the *Fioretti*.

“ Brother Peter was keeping the fast of S. Michael the Archangel with great devotion, and on the last day of the fast, as he stood praying in the church, he was heard by a young brother, who lay carefully

hidden under the High Altar to see some sign of his holiness, talking with S. Michael the Archangel: and the words they said were these. S. Michael said: 'Brother Peter, you have wearied yourself so faithfully for me, and afflicted your body in many ways; behold, I have come to console you, and that you may ask of me what grace you will, and I will obtain it of God.'

"Brother Peter replied: 'Most holy captain of the heavenly hosts, who art full of zealous fidelity for the divine honour, and a merciful protector of souls, I ask of thee this grace, that thou obtain of God the pardon of my sins.' S. Michael replied: 'Ask another grace, for this I shall obtain for you with the greatest ease'; and as brother Peter asked nothing else, the Archangel concluded: 'By reason of the devout faith you have in me, I will procure the grace which you ask and many others.' And when their talk, which lasted a great while, was done, S. Michael departed, leaving him immensely consoled."

CINGOLI.—Cingoli is hidden from Treja by a spur of the Vicino mountains. It is reached from it by a winding road descending to several river beds, then slowly rising up the considerable ascent of 1,000 feet to the narrow city. Interesting from its association with Angelo Clareno, author of the



*Tribulationes*, and the chief representative of the Zelanti, Cingoli deserves also from its position to rank as one of the most noteworthy cities of the Marches. It lies at the extremity of an uneven spur of mountain springing from Monte San Vicino, whose blue peak is visible above it, very near at hand. To the north, the low outposts of the San Vicino range open out to the Apennines, where Monte Catria rises clear and powerful above the sequent lines of intervening mountains. The city towers in remote majesty above the plain, which flows in low curving waves to the coast, like the sea itself when tossed on a breezy day into many wavelets. Except immediately below the mountains, its undulations are more gentle and rippling than in the Marches farther south. There are fewer deep valleys and narrow ravines, yet these waves, so inconspicuous from the heights, are often quite lofty plateaus. Cingoli is little seen from the north-west or south-west approach. Like many of these hill-set cities, its appearance suffers strange metamorphoses according to the quarter from which it is viewed, from one point scarcely more perceptible than a great square rock or single castle, while from another it is seen outspread in a long curve round its hill-top. There is little room for expansion on these summits; the extent of the city is determined by the angles of its rocky base.



A long, straight, and narrow corso leads down from the summit to the extremity of the town stretching from wall to wall. On a festival day it is a fine channel of colour, the grey pavement carpeted with flowers and the windows hung with gorgeous bed-covers and other impromptu trappings, while the vestmented procession, visible up its whole extent, moves with slow chant to the duomo.

A few towers of great beauty still remain—though their churches have suffered change—and a porch of ancient interest, belonging to the church of S. Francesco, near the centre of the north-west boundary. There are strange animal designs in the curve of the arch, and, in the lunette above, a pathetic stone figure of S. Francis, not a little like the figure of Cimabue's Assisi fresco, and like it bearing some object in its arms, which it is impossible to identify.

There are several convents in the outskirts of the town, but none of primitive foundation. The church and former convent of S. Sostanza, a little to the north of the town, is architecturally interesting, having preserved far better than many others its original form of broad low arches and single aisle. Steps rise on either side of the altar to the choir, where fine remnants of work are to be seen in its pillars. The crypt is hopelessly obscured in Renaissance casings.

FORANO.—The little convent of Forano is situated some miles to the south-east of Cingoli, between Appignano and Monte Cassiano, reached by a slight deviation from the road between Cingoli and Recanati. It was founded by Francis, apparently on the site of an already existing chapel, of which a door and fragment of wall still remain on the left side of the present chapel. It is of historic interest as one of the chief refuges of the Zelanti, as it were under the wing of their leader's home ; for Cingoli seems a beacon and guardian of this peaceful, pastoral spot, the jagged outline of its towers defined against the sky to the north-west. The convent is slightly below the level of the road, amongst cornfields and orchards and wooded slopes, its upper windows looking out to the west, where the folding outlines of the S. Vicino range, the Apennines, and the Sibillines are enwoven along the horizon. The deep lanes around the convent are bordered with fragrant hedges of honeysuckle and thornless white roses.

It has, as usual, been greatly enlarged ; but the door through which tradition says that Francis used to pass is reserved for a yearly opening and Indulgence. The convent well is common to the brothers and the peasants of the country-side ; one may still see the women waiting outside the cloisters to which admittance is denied them, while some

labourer fills their weighty earthen jars from the well within. They walk with ease, sometimes with majesty, poising their heavy burden as if unconscious of it; even tiny children may be seen with miniature pitchers, practising early this art of dexterous and delicate adjustment, "our Italy's own attitude."

Forano was the shelter of two Brothers who were famous in the Order for the closeness of their friendship, brother Peter of Treja and Conrad of Offida. The peculiar intimacy between them seems to have been sealed by a vision which came to one or both of them in the woods near Forano.<sup>1</sup>

The vision was of the Virgin Mary and the infant Christ, who appeared to Conrad in a great blaze of light; but Peter, who was watching from afar,<sup>2</sup> was conscious that a revelation had been granted to his friend, and when Conrad returned full of joy from the wood, greeted him with the words: "O man of God, you have had great consolation to-day." Brother Conrad said: "What is that you are saying, brother Peter? How do you know what I have had?" "Well I know," said brother Peter; "well I know how the Virgin

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xlii.

<sup>2</sup> It is a curious characteristic of the brothers that they do not seem to have thought reverence for privacy so incumbent on them in a spiritual as in a human relationship.

Mary and her blessed child have visited you." Then brother Conrad, who, as a truly humble man, desired to keep secret the favours of God, prayed him that he would tell no one; and so great was the love between them from that time forth, that they seemed to share one heart and one soul in everything.

The two Brothers further entered into a bond to communicate to each other any "divine consolation" which might be granted to either of them. Brother Peter was the next favoured. Praying one day at Forano, the longing came upon him to divine whether the Virgin, S. John, or S. Francis had suffered most deeply in the thought of Christ's Passion. And as he stood wrapt in this curious reflection, the three subjects of his meditation appeared to him all clothed in glorious raiment, but S. Francis in the most splendid of all. And S. John, answering Peter's thought, told him that after himself and Mary, S. Francis had suffered most pain in the Passion of Christ. But the apparition had roused fresh doubt in Peter's mind, and he said: "'Most holy Apostle of Christ, why does the garment of S. Francis appear more beautiful than thine?' S. John replied: 'The reason is this, that when he was on earth he wore viler garments than I.'

"And when he had said these words, S. John

gave Peter a glorious garment which he was carrying in his hand, and said to him : 'Take this garment which I have obtained for you.' And when S. John would have clothed him in that garment, brother Peter fell to the ground stupefied, and he began to cry : 'Brother Conrad, dearest brother Conrad, help me quickly : come and see marvellous things.' And as he said these holy words the vision disappeared. And when brother Conrad came, he told him everything in order, and they gave thanks to God."<sup>1</sup>

RECANATI.—Recanati lies along one of the last ridges of the Ancona Marches before the sea, which in the broad, receding bays north and south of Loreto seems almost to break upon it. The western bend of the town curls inwards so suddenly as to be entirely unsuspected till the projecting corner of cliff is reached beyond the Leopardi Palace, the Colle dell' Infinito famous as the poet's haunt. In the beginning of last century this western portion was a borgo distinct from the town itself. The Colle dell' Infinito has been spoiled by its celebrity, cut round in terraces, and its name posted above it on a new portion of the convent wall which crowns the summit. To the north-east of it and slightly outside the town is the still

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xliii.

inhabited convent of the *frati*. From these lower slopes the outlook over the bay is very lovely. Olive and vine gardens cover them, among which in early summer the tall maize springs like graceful lily-leaves; the corn presses high round the grey olive-trunks—which here are thick and upright, not fantastic skeletons with gnarled and twisted joints as at Assisi—and their silvery foliage frames the hyacinth-blue of the sea.

From a Bull of Pope Innocent IV. it appears that the present convent was being built in 1245: of the earlier convent, founded by Francis, no trace remains. It existed in 1216, since a Chapter was held there in that year.<sup>1</sup>

The name of Benvenuto, a lay Brother and native of Recanati, is associated with the convent, where he died in 1289. He worked in the kitchen, and succeeded in combining his religious and practical duties without an oppressive sense of antagonism between them. On one occasion, however, he failed to realise this higher unity. He lit the fire and made the first preparation for the meal, then went to mass, and became so wrapt in contemplation of its mysteries that he remained for hours completely lost in his meditation. When he came to himself, he hurried back to the kitchen

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xlv., and *Mariotti*, *I Primordi dell' Ordine Minoritico nelle Marche*, pp. 162-3.

bitterly blaming his forgetfulness ; but his usual cheerful, whole-hearted service was not to go unrewarded—everything was in order, his work had been done by an angel in human form.<sup>1</sup>

A nearer and more vital interest than the Lesser Brothers enchains us on these slopes, where the delicate and lonely boy, the student and poet, Leopardi passed some of the happiest hours of his sad life. His poems are full of reminiscences, incidental or definitely descriptive, which, however slight, revive and kindle the memory of all who have known and loved this country. Yet his infirmities so far crippled his great genius that his lips spelt Nature's name less truly than the simple brothers who were moved they knew not why : they formed no word but Love from its letters, while the poet saw a cold and loveless fate behind the rosy mask. He had words to tell Nature's beauty and to name it a lie : few of the Brothers could find utterance in words, but they trusted their inspiration and acted the joy they felt.

It was at Recanati that John of La Penna was received into the Order.<sup>2</sup> There is a certain pathos in the simple story of his life, which was passed in constant and joyful expectation of death. When he was a boy, in the early days

<sup>1</sup> From the translation of the *Auréole Sèraphique* by Père Léon.

<sup>2</sup> *Fioretti*, xlv.



of the Order, he had a vision, which seemed to him sent from God, promising that after a long journey he should go to Him in Heaven. The journey to Recanati was the first of a series which he undertook, always in the hope of speedy release to Paradise, and always with the same patient acceptance of his disappointment. He died at last in the Marches after twenty-five years spent in service in Provence, whither as a boy he had journeyed in glad confidence, and thirty more as guardian of a March convent, where with equal confidence he had returned.

It is possible that this brother John was the little boy whose night adventure with Francis is related in *Fioretti*, xvii. We know that his initiation took place early in the history of the Order, so that he may well have seen Francis, and the incident seems to breathe the atmosphere of the Marches. The scene is laid in a very small convent and in the wood close to it; and the story is vivified with delightful human touches: the curiosity of the boy to discover Francis' doings by night, which is added almost parenthetically to his praiseworthy desire of carefully studying the saint's holiness; his precaution against oversleeping, and the tenderness of Francis in carrying back the child who had fainted outside the hut in the wood.

“A boy of great purity and innocence was re-



ceived into the Order during the lifetime of S. Francis, and he lived in a little colony, where of necessity the brothers slept on mats. In course of time S. Francis came to this place, and in the evening, after compline, he lay down to sleep as was his wont, that he might rise in the night to pray while the other brothers slept. Now this boy made up his mind diligently to watch the ways of S. Francis, that he might learn to know his holiness, and especially that he might discover what he did at night when he got up.

“And lest sleep should play him false, the boy lay down to sleep beside S. Francis, and tied his cord to that of S. Francis, that he might feel him get up : and S. Francis felt nothing of all this. But in the night, when all the other brothers were in their first sleep, he arose and found his cord thus tied ; and he loosed it gently, so that the boy should not feel it, and S. Francis went out alone into the wood, which was close to the house, and went into a little cell which was there and began to pray.

“And after a little while the boy awoke, and finding his cord loosed and S. Francis gone, he got up also, and went in search of him : and finding the door open which led into the wood, he thought that S. Francis must have gone out by it, and he also went into the wood.

“And as he drew near to the place where S. Francis was praying, he began to hear much talk ; and going still closer to see and hear what it was, he perceived a marvellous light surrounding S. Francis, and in it he saw Christ and the Virgin Mary, and S. John the Baptist and S. John the Evangelist and a great multitude of angels, who were talking with S. Francis. When he saw and heard this, the boy fell fainting to the ground : and when the mystery of that holy apparition was ended and S. Francis was returning to the house, he stumbled against the boy, who lay as if dead ; and in pity he lifted him up, and carried him in his arms, as the Good Shepherd His lambs.”

SARNANO.—This beautiful town early formed one of the chief Franciscan centres in the Marches. Its narrow streets, shadowed by tall solemn houses which rise in curving lines, tier above tier, seem to belong to times remote. The house which tradition says sheltered S. Francis on his first visit is at the summit of the town, looking out on a piazza grass-grown and deserted, and in the old library opposite, the manuscripts slumber in their shelves for want of an interpreter. Yet its citizens will tell you that their town is not deserted, that every house is full ; certainly its ancient state has gone and its lords of gentle birth.



SARNANO  
(FROM S. FRANCESCO DI VALCAJANO)



The scutcheon of the city bears a threefold device : the French lilies, marking the French origin of the counts of Varano its seigneurs ; the cross of Savoy ; and a seraph, the Franciscan symbol. It is said that Francis acted as peacemaker between three contending lords, each of whom claimed the right to quarter his arms alone on the scutcheon of the town. With the end of his cord the Saint traced on it the figure of a seraph. His judgment satisfied the litigants, and his device was adopted. In gratitude for his settlement the townsfolk gave him a piece of land on which to build a convent.

It is from this convent that the beauty of the town itself is best seen. S. Francesco di Valcajano stands at the summit of a sloping meadow on the central crest of a long wooded hill, about three kilometres from the town. It consists of a long low building of great simplicity, the whole of which, including the little chapel at the east end, is now used by farm people. A disused door leads from the chapel into the tiny sacristy, which now serves as larder. The rooms above open without doorway on a continuous corridor, uniting them all ; each has a tiny window looking south, and the one over the sacristy in particular, with arched stone ceiling, is plainly of great age.

The situation is one of the most lovely ever granted to Francis or chosen by him. In the calm

summer evenings there is an indescribable charm in the place itself and its approach. The convent hill is separated from the road by a narrow ravine, through which gushes the tiny rivulet of Terro, forming deep blue pools among the smooth shelving rocks ; the ascent leads through cornfields and oak woods to the green meadow crowned by the convent. Sarnano is prominent in the southern foreground beautifully clustering round its hill, the dusky bricks catching a deep ruddy glow from the evening light and its ancient towers and solemn white-faced clock outlined against the sky. Close at hand to the north-west rise the last ramparts of the Sibillines in massive outline of rich red sandstone and springing spires of silver-grey rock, the latter covered even to the summit with creeping green like a garment loosely flung on a noble sculptured form. In the southern distance are seen the dim, single forms of the mountains behind Ascoli, and to the right of them, faintly discerned in phantom whiteness, the furthest Sibillines. Far away to the north-west against the spreading after-glow, Monte San Vicino leans in dim, distant isolation across the wide spaces of springing tableland and valley. There is a wide freedom and woodland freshness around the hilltop, combined with the majesty and restraining force of the neighbouring mountains.

SOFFIANO.—But the Brothers did not long remain content with this degree of solitude. They soon began to seek a wilder and more complete seclusion by pressing into the mountains up the narrow bed of the Terro. The Grotto of Soffiano, or, as the natives call it, the Grotto of S. Liberato—after the Brother best known in this locality—is nearly three hours' walk from the city. It is set in the heart of the mountain, which spreads its arms in wide embrace, one reaching down to touch Sarnano. Below it, the tiny torrent of the Terro comes leaping from the midst of the great curving mountain ; deep in its stony bed, it flows, a translucent amber, over the brown polished pebbles. The path to the grotto, when it leaves the torrent-bed to climb the mountain side, is no more than a rough sheep-track among the shrubs and undergrowth of oak and beech and fragrant herb which scantily clothe it. Above the grotto towers a massive wall of red rock, as it were baked in a huge furnace, and the mountain side projecting round it completely shuts it off from view of the country. Facing it, across the ravine, a mighty sandstone cliff rises above a perpendicular grey wall of rock, pouring down after seasons of rain or frost a perilous stream of ruddy dust and stone over the grass and trees of its lower slopes. A solitary group of beeches forms an island of shade on the side

of the red battlemented cliff, facing east over the Marches to the distant sea-line. If any dare trust himself to the winding sheep-tracks which lose themselves to spring again into distinctness, deserting the climber at the broad waterfalls of shingle to dart on beyond in delusive security till they end in a pasture whence there is no outlet, it is from here that the structure of the peaks may best be seen which dominate this solitude and lead up the masses of mountain masonry, the crown of aspiring earth, into the light and upper air.

The morning sun pours into this deep recess, but long before the open mountain side, it is folded in indistinguishable shadow. Few birds nest in these treeless solitudes. The only sound which comes to them is the lowing of cattle and the tinkling of their bells, or the monotonous reiteration of the goatherd's song, with its long-drawn close, which seems a fitting voice to the mute melancholy of the place.

The grotto is a chamber of lofty proportions, formed, with little modification, from a recess in the mountain side. The tiles of its flooring can still be seen beneath the accumulated dust and the heaped ruins of its masonry; it can never have been more than a single room with a rude partition wall. It is particularly associated with the memory of three brothers—Pacífico (not the poet), Umile



his brother, and Liberato, a member of the ancient family of Brunforte, whose ruined castle stands only a few miles distant. The meagre record of their life here is contained in chapters xlvi. and xlvii. of the *Fioretti*. Pacifico was living in a distant hermitage at the time of his brother's death at Soffiano, but he was made aware of it in a vision, and saw his disembodied spirit fly to heaven without hindrance or delay from impurity or sin. Several years afterwards Pacifico was himself sent to Soffiano; he had not been there long when the lords of Brunforte, who, perhaps through the influence of Liberato, were interested in the Lesser Brothers, begged them to move to a place less inaccessible from their castle, and built for them the convent, now known as S. Liberato, which is set in close shelter of the mountain, about an hour's walk from Brunforte, half-encircled by woods of beech and oak. Here the bones of Umile were brought for re-interment, and Pacifico, with great devotion, washed and kissed them, and wrapped them in a white cloth. This action was a stumbling-block to the Brothers, who seemed to see in it respect for a carnal tie, ill-befitting one who had renounced all particular relationships. Pacifico, seeing their dissatisfaction, humbly stated the warrant of his action, and declared his readiness to do the same for any Brother

of whom he should be granted the same certainty of perfection, as shown in a sudden translation to untrammelled life.

Chapter xlvii. of the *Fioretti* relates the vision of an unnamed Brother immediately preceding his death. The description of his person seems applicable to Liberato, and the account no doubt refers to him. He appears to have been a man of great tenderness and love, so that even the wild birds came round him without fear, and, despite his solitary habits, he did not, like brother Rufino, fall into moroseness. "When he was asked concerning anything, he replied so graciously and so wisely that he seemed rather an angel than a man."

The building of the new convent, no doubt, did not mean the entire desertion of the grotto, which would be more easily accessible from S. Liberato than from S. Francesco di Valcajano. The path from it to the grotto winds through the mountain pastures, where the turf is short and fresh and soft to tread. Fields of clover creep up into it, wherever they can find nourishment. The air is sweet with scent of bracken, among which spring the mountain lily and wild strawberry. On the side sheltered by the woods, these fresh mountain pastures reach down almost to the door of the convent, divided from it only by a narrow stream,

which, in a deep bed fringed with willow and poplar and young beeches, trickles down below the path into the plain. The convent is a long, low building, with no cloisters, but an arcade along one side. In the chapel is preserved a portrait of S. Liberato, which, though in no way remarkable for its artistic qualities, is not without beauty: it is plainly the expression of real feeling and an attempt at individual portraiture—no mere stereotype of a conventional saint.

The convent, though deserted, has not been allowed to fall into decay. It is inhabited by an old man of no little ardour for its saintly memories, and it is apparently a place of regular pilgrimage for the pious. It peers out from its wooded nest over a wide district of the Marches to the distant sea-line, and can be seen for many miles—a gleam of brightness in the dark mountain side.

PENNA SAN GIOVANNI.—As the home and burial-place of the boy-brother John, Penna has been named after him; a necessary distinction in a country where Penna is almost a generic name. It is at the eastern extremity of the first ridge over which the road passes from Sarnano to the coast, and is one of the most exalted of all the March citadels. From the lofty backbone of the ridge the view to north and south is unsurpassed, similar in kind

to that from many other of these hill villages, but far more extended. Penna turns only a huge battlement of rock, surmounted by the grey citadel, to the ridge which it terminates. A steep paved way leads up through several arches to the crowning piazza, still overlooked by the convent precincts of S. Francesco, which are now devoted to municipal purposes. Beautiful remnants of the cloister, wrought in brick, can still be seen, though many of the arches have been blocked by the secular buildings. From the eastern gate of the town a long, winding road drops down the great descent to the broad, dry, Tenna bed.

MONTE GIORGIO, FALLERONE, MASSA, MOGLIANO.  
—Monte Giorgio is the most considerable of the four towns which I have classed together as in some sense related—like members of a body—since each is set on some crest or branch of the same highland. It was inevitable that in the comparative isolation which the wide intervening valleys involved, such little towns as shared a ridge in common should be thrown together in closer intercourse; and, in fact, we gather from the *Fioretti*, which has much to tell of the little communities in the above-named towns, that there was a constant interchange of ideas and courtesies between them.

Monte Giorgio is only a few miles distant from the sea; the plain at its foot is already widening out to the coast, and from the piazza of S. Francesco, at the summit of the town, it is clearly seen in broad expanse along the coast-line as far north as Monte Cornero. Looking inland from the same point it is possible on a clear day to have sight of the Gran Sasso to the south-west, and of the western wall of the Marches in its whole extent.

Monte Giorgio's chief title to Franciscan fame rests on its acceptance as the birthplace of Ugolino, compiler of the *Fioretti*.<sup>1</sup> Living in a later generation, he was dependent on hearsay for his information; the greater part he learned from Jacob of La Massa, who had been well-known and respected by the original followers of Francis, and who had enjoyed the fruitful privilege of intimacy with brother Leo. Some say that it was in the kitchen of the convent at Massa that Ugolino had the tales from his lips. This convent stands on a hill to the north of the town separated from it by a steep descent and a few miles distant only from Mogliano, the scene of John of La Verna's morning vision.

The cloisters and convent of Massa are now a

<sup>1</sup> "L'autore del *Fioretti*," Camillo Pace, *Rivista abruzzese*, Anno xix., Fasc. ii. The author of this article, an elementary schoolmaster of Monte Giorgio, is a man of keen intelligence, and a genuinely scientific student of Franciscan history.

common pleasure-ground, and falling into disorderly ruin ; but the old round-capped tower still rises picturesquely from the surrounding woods, and the kitchen of the convent seems alive and apt for tale-telling. Its old arched ceiling is blackened and grimy, and the benches are worm-eaten and decayed, but a cupboard door stands ajar as if left open by a living inmate, and through the kitchen door one can see the little paved passage and the winding stair leading to the cells above. As one stood peering at it through the grated window, it seemed the brothers might creep in once more and take their places round the hearth, bidding their tale-teller unlock his store and feed their hunger for tales of good example. We know in what repute brother Jacob of La Massa was held by others than the March Brothers. It was Giles who whetted Ugolino's desire to see him, by his enthusiastic praise of his judgment and eloquence. "If you wish to be well-informed in the spiritual life, try to speak with brother Jacob of La Massa (for brother Giles desired to be taught by him) ; for nothing can be added to nor taken away from his words, because his mind has entered into the secret things of heaven, and his words are the words of the Holy Spirit, and there is no man on earth whom I so much desire to see."<sup>1</sup> We do not know

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xlviii.

how far Ugolino modified the stories which came to him from Jacob. If he faithfully reported them, the wonderful touches of delicate humour and pathos in the *Fioretti* make us feel that the brother of La Massa had studied God, through intercourse with his creatures, no less than in solitary vigils of devout contemplation.

FALLERONE.—The home of another Jacobo<sup>1</sup> and of that Peregrino who was fellow-student of Roger at Bologna, and was moved with him by Francis' eloquence, stands at the end of a peninsula looking west to the Sibillines and falling away abruptly to the south and north, where it overlooks the Marches to Monte S. Vicino, and to Ascoli. Below it, in the plain near the banks of the Tenna, are still to be seen huge rugged pillars of rough-hewn stone and the relics of an amphitheatre, marking the site of the ancient city of Fallera, from whose ruins much of the present town is built, and where the labourer's spade still disinters spoils of pavement, coins, and stone inscriptions, which imagination may vitalise. The museum at Fallerone is hung with these dumb symbols of an energy still living at the root of the strong, enduring masonry of these parts. For many of the hill cities of the Marches are built from the ruins of the old Roman

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, li.



cities of the plain, and often, wrought into their stonework, bear fragments of a still remoter past, once torn from their true setting to be worn as trophies of pride on the front of youth, till Time dints those features also with the levelling seal of age.

“Or dov’è il suono

Di que’ popoli antichi? or dov’è il grido

De’ nostri avi famosi, e il grande impero

Di quella Roma, e l’armi e il fragorio

Che n’andò per la terra e l’ oceano?

Tutto è pace e silenzio, e tutto posa

Il mondo, e più di lor non si ragiona.”<sup>1</sup>

These last two lines are true not only of the mighty Romans who have given a tongue to every stone of Italy, they are surely true also in part of that joyful brotherhood who “illumined and adorned the world by teaching and example.” Their light has gone out and is forgotten where their fame was brightest :

“e più di lor non si ragiona”;

they, too, are folded in the past, and the common seal of age is upon their works and what to them was ancient history. Is it without significance that the museum containing the Roman antiquities is in the precincts of the old convent of Fallerone? Fragments of its cloisters can still be seen, but like most of those in the central Marches, it has fallen

<sup>1</sup> G. Leopardi, *La sera del dì di festa*.



to municipal purposes and the spell of its *clausura* is broken.

Opposite this building, across the narrow street, is a house-front of great beauty, once also forming part of the cloistral buildings, but now passed into the service of a shop. Its windows are set between beautifully wrought arched columns, and a central arch bears traces of an ancient fresco. All these small cities, or "paesi," have a common dignity and spaciousness in their construction which makes the name of village or even town seem too humble for them—though their size is insignificant ; but they are lacking in the picturesque angles of the little Umbrian cities, owing partly, no doubt, to the limitations of their site.

FERMO.—The home of brother John of La Verna, so named from his long sojourn on that mountain, is a town of considerable size, a few miles inland from the seaport of S. Giorgio. Nothing bars it from the sea to the east, and from the grass piazza surrounding the duomo at its summit it looks back to the Sibillines across the whole extent of the Marches. It is separated from Monte Giorgio by the Tenna, which here has channelled in its broad bed a swift and narrow stream to the sea. Except about its Rocca, which towers considerably above the main portion of the town, there is a sense of confinement,

a lack of wide freedom and expanse from any angle of the city, surprising in a situation of such great natural beauty, and still more surprising in a city of the Marches, where freedom of outlook is so common as to be taken almost for granted.

The church of S. Pietro, whose canons caused such scandal to John when he lived amongst them, by the luxury of their life and their interference with his excessive abstinence,<sup>1</sup> stands to the south of the town, outside the Rocca and considerably below it. Over the door is a rude figure of S. Peter with the keys. Next to it, a few steps lower down, is the still older church of S. Zenobio, dating from the middle of the twelfth century. Rude symbols are carved in the arch over the door, strange figures in meaningless attitudes, with grotesque, expressionless faces. Within, a breach in the Renaissance plaster round one of the capitals reveals the old buried sculpture alive and waiting its revival.

The convent of S. Francesco, built slightly after his time, is also below the town, on its south-eastern side : a little vine-trellised garden looks out towards the sea. The proportions of the church are noble, but have lost all freedom and spring of line in their plaster uniform.

I have purposely dealt with only a few Franciscan "places" in the Marches—those mentioned in the

<sup>1</sup> *Fioretti*, xlix.

*Fioretti*. For a comprehensive treatment of the various traditional journeys of Francis in the Marches, and of the convents founded by him, I must refer the reader to the valuable publication of Padre Mariotti,<sup>1</sup> from which I have several times had occasion to quote: *I Primordi dell' Ordine Minoritico nelle Marche*.

<sup>1</sup> Guardian of the Franciscans at Matelica.

## LA VERNA

THE mountain of La Verna, crowned by the lofty peak of Penna, is situated in the centre of the Apennines which traverse the Casentino, between the valleys of the Arno and the Tiber. Its darkly-wooded crest is conspicuous from afar ; even from Subasio it may be seen on a clear day, a square dark mass on the faint outline of the mountain horizon. From La Penna, which is the northern extremity of the mountain, the woods slope gradually down to the castle of Chiusi, the shell of which still exists, noble in decay, only just without the southern border of the beech woods. This long southern slope forms the only connexion of the great promontory with the surrounding tableland. The immense perpendicular cliffs, which make its wooded summit inaccessible on all other sides, gradually diminish in height till, in the neighbourhood of Chiusi, they are only a low, craggy wall sloping down to the meadows. The outline of the mountain is curiously jagged and serrated, broken by caverns and deep precipices ; trees and plants spring among the crevices, their stems escaping branded from their early bondage.

The rocks are fantastic in form and character, sometimes severed from the mass of the mountain above, and tapering to so narrow a base that they seem to be swung in mid-air. The most conspicuous of these disjointed masses of rock is connected with a brigand, who used it as a safe prison for his victims, but who under Francis' influence entered the Order as brother Lamb (Fra Agnello).

The summit of the mountain contains very little level ground. In the centre of the woods is a deep dell like a vast crater, its steep sides lined with trees which rise triumphantly to crown La Penna and the many lesser heights of the promontory. The most level portion of the mountain is the clearing round the convent, which recommended itself to the Brothers on this account. It lies considerably below the summit of the mountain, on its south-west extremity, sheltered by the woods from the north and east, and with uninterrupted view of the mountains to south and west. The irregularities and chasms in the cliff adjoining this level space are still very remarkable ; they must have been more so in the early days of the settlement, for their character is now partly obscured by the galleries and passages which connect the various portions of rock hallowed by usage of S. Francis and others of his followers.

The original settlement is now a network of cells and chapels, and it is difficult imaginatively to reconstruct the isolation of the single branch-made huts. The slight fabrics of mud and sticks, which were the most solid structures Francis would allow, have long been replaced by more enduring masonry ; the chasms have been bridged by solid causeways of stone, and even the redoubtable Precipizio, a perpendicular wall of rock which falls abruptly down to the meadows more than 100 feet below, can be approached by a rock-hewn stair.

It is difficult to realise from the present arrangement of the buildings that the second cell inhabited by Francis was chosen for its greater remoteness from the common settlement of the Brothers ; for it is now included, together with the chapel built over the place where the stigmatised seraph appeared to him, and with the oratory of brother Leo only a few steps above this chapel, in a long passage known as the Passage of the Stigmata, which runs from the brink of the cliff facing west where the Stigmatisation took place, to the open loggia of the Chiesa Maggiore, the principal church of the convent. The passage is built partly in the rock, lighted by ten small windows on the left, where it looks out directly over the wide mountain horizon ; from the low-barred windows on the right, one may look down on the perilous

rocky chasm which lies immediately below it; midway along the passage a cradle-shaped recess in the rock, known as the bed of S. Francis, overhangs the chasm. The chapel of S. Maria degli Angeli, built for Francis by Orlando of Chiusi, and later enlarged, is also now surrounded by convent buildings, and is approached from the sacristy of the Chiesa Maggiore. Both chapels are decorated with terra cotta reliefs of the della Robbia school. The site of Francis' first cell is marked by a chapel known as the Cappella della Maddalena, forming now the lower storey of another chapel; several other simple stone huts and chapels are scattered about in this precipitous corner of the mountain, and above the level of the convent rising towards the upper woods. The most interesting of these in association is the Chapel of the Beech on the outskirts of the pine woods; for it was here that the famous saint of the Marches, Giovanni da Fermo, who joined the Order as a boy, dwelt during his long sojourn at La Verna.<sup>1</sup>

The convent of La Verna at present inhabited, has been added to from time to time by individual

<sup>1</sup> Giovanni da Fermo, better known as Giovanni della Verna, was an intimate friend of Jacopone da Todi. Warned in a vision of his friend's approaching death, Giovanni left his cell on the mountain and hastened to Todi to administer to him the last Sacrament.

donors, and is thus rather a collection of buildings than an harmonious whole. But it is picturesque in grouping, lying round three sides of a fine, open piazza, and though large enough to accommodate over a hundred brothers, it is simple and unobtrusive. In the fifteenth century it was partially destroyed by fire, and in the same century suffered desecration during the wars between the rival states of Venice and Florence. During the last century, also, the brothers were disturbed by threatened and enforced dissolution. They continue now in peaceful possession on sufferance of the convent's present owner, who has it on lease from the municipality of Florence.

The Guardian, Padre Saturnino da Caprese<sup>1</sup> is a man of unusual cultivation and large-minded courtesy, eager to welcome and shelter visitors; unstinted hospitality is shown to all pilgrims of whatever degree.

Further description of the commemorative buildings, which, though early, were subsequent to the first settlement, and of the convent itself, would not help us to reconstruct the original scene. The existence of the buildings and the attendant modi-

<sup>1</sup> His *Guida Illustrata della Verna* contains a detailed account of the present convent and its surroundings, the historical and traditional events connected with it, and a complete list of the flora of the mountain.





CHAPEL ON LA VERN



fications of the mountain's natural ruggedness make the nature of its appeal to S. Francis more difficult to estimate, but our main work must lie in an attempt to re-create the conditions he knew, and to set them as background to the traditions of his sojourn there.

One of the most significant episodes of Francis' life is the account of his meeting with Orlando da Chiusi and the gift of La Verna. It is significant, because this mountain, the most glorious material possession of the Poverello, was the scene of his most intense and intimate spiritual experience. The incident is assigned by the *Fioretti* to the year 1224, when Francis was forty-three years of age. This was undoubtedly the date of his last visit to La Verna, when he received the impression of the Stigmata; but a deed drawn up in 1274 by Orlando's sons, assigning 1213 as the date of his gift, proves conclusively that the meeting at S. Leo took place at least eleven years earlier than the date assigned to it in the *Fioretti*, and incidentally that the visit of 1224 was not Francis' first visit. The confusion is, however, explained, if we remember that the considerations of the Holy Stigmata, which form a kind of appendix to the *Fioretti*, are intended rather as a devotional exercise than as an historic document. The writer has, of course, obscured his aim by allowing himself to introduce a specification of

date which is out of place in such a treatise, but it is easy to see that he is using his material with the freedom of an artist, combining in one canvas, for the enrichment of his central theme, the scattered scenes of a prolonged experience. He relates one visit only, and that the last and most vital, of S. Francis to La Verna; round that visit he groups incidents which plainly belong to various dates.

We gather from this source that Francis was journeying from the valley of Spoleto to the province of Romagna, in company with brother Leo; and as they journeyed, they passed on foot by the citadel<sup>1</sup> of Montefeltro, now known as S. Leo.

This little town, lying some miles to the south-west of S. Marino, is one of the most remarkable features of Central Italy. In the midst of a country distinguished by its natural rocky fortresses rising with startling abruptness from the wild mountain valleys and tablelands around, it is

<sup>1</sup> The Italian "castello," like the Latin "castrum," has no exact equivalent in English. It survives only as a suffix which has lost its significance, in such names as Doncaster. The reality, however, still exists throughout Italy. In the Tiber valley, and notably in the Marches and Romagna, every eminence bears its stronghold whose solid masonry is knit fast with the natural rock. It appears, often up to the very gate, like the single castle from which it takes its name, consisting originally of the fortress of some noble, that enclosed for defence within its walls the homes of his dependants.



SAN LEO

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the most remarkable of all. The castle of S. Leo, still used as a military station, is set on the summit of a precipitous headland, at the extremity of a line of sharp, rocky cliffs of the same nature, though less pronounced. It is a rock of really stupendous proportions, rising from the land with a sheer and naked majesty with which few cliffs rise from the sea, and the meadowland breaks in green waves round its base. Approaching from S. Marino to the naked face of barren, rigid rock, and winding through the single gate up the steep paved street, the first feeling is of compelled submission to power rather than of glad subjection to beauty; but the southern slopes of the miniature plateau are gentler in aspect, enringing the little town in a crescent of meadow-green.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From this southern slope can be seen the former convent of Santigne, founded by S. Francis. It stands about a mile from S. Leo, on a hillside considerably below the level of the citadel, and is approached by a rough track, bordered by bracken and wild flowers, on the outskirts of an oak wood, which rises behind the convent, sheltering it from the north. The chapel is still in use for services, but since its suppression under Napoleon I. the convent buildings have fallen out of repair, and are now inhabited by peasants.

According to Mariotti, a tradition current at S. Leo assigns the following origin to the name Santigne :—

“Once when the holy man had set out walking with his companions during a very dark night, and had lost his way, nor could find any manner of outlet from the dense wooded undergrowth,

S. Leo cannot have changed very much since the memorable day when Francis and Leo passed by, and at Francis' suggestion mounted up the steep road to take part in some festivities within the gates. The noble duomo, still intact from renovation, may have been already completed. The little church of the Pieve, close beside it, had certainly existed for several hundred years, and the piazza on which Francis preached still crowns the single street. A great company had assembled at S. Leo to assist at the knighting of one of its counts. Francis' early associations, and the chivalrous instincts which long survived them, would lead him to take special delight in such a ceremony. To this was added his hope of gathering "some good spiritual fruit." It is worth while to transcribe in full the picturesque account given in the *Fioretti* of his meeting with Orlando.

"Among the other gentlemen of that country

there shone suddenly down from the heights above him a flame of exceeding brightness, so that, walking in the light of it, and by its radiance, they escaped from every peril, and reached a safe and convenient place, where they spent the rest of the night, after giving thanks to God for His exceeding grace. In memory of which the holy father, when he had obtained that site from the Commune of the place for the building of a convent, desired that it should be called Sant' Igne (holy fire), by which name it has always been called and is still called, though one word has been made out of two—Santigne."



who had come to join that knightly company was a great and, moreover, a rich gentleman of Tuscany, by name Orlando da Chiusi of Casentino, who, for the marvellous things he had heard of the holiness and the miracles of S. Francis, bore much devotion to him, and had a great desire to see him and hear him preach. Coming to the castle, S. Francis entered in and went up to the piazza where all the company of gentlemen were assembled; and in fervour of spirit he mounted on a low wall and began to preach, choosing for the text of his sermon these words in the vulgar tongue :—

‘Tanto è il bene ch’io aspetto,  
Ch’ogni pena m’è diletto.’

And on this text, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he preached so devoutly and so profoundly . . . that everyone stood with eyes and mind fixed upon him, and listened as if an angel of God were speaking; among whom, the said Orlando, whose heart was touched by God through the marvellous preaching of S. Francis, resolved to commune and reason with him after the sermon of the things of his soul. So when the sermon was done he drew S. Francis aside and said to him: ‘O father, I would commune with you touching my soul’s health.’ S. Francis replied: ‘It pleases me well; but go this morning and do honour to your friends

who have invited you to the feast, and dine with them.' And after dinner he returned to S. Francis and set before him fully the things of his soul. And at the end this lord Orlando said to S. Francis: 'I have a mountain in Tuscany, most meet for devotion, which is called the mountain of La Verna,<sup>1</sup> and it is very solitary and perfectly fitted for anyone who should wish to do penance in a place far remote from men, or for anyone who desires a solitary life. If it pleased you, I would gladly give it to you and your companions for my soul's health.' S. Francis, hearing so liberal an offer of a thing which he greatly desired, rejoiced exceedingly on this account, and praising and thanking

<sup>1</sup> The name may perhaps be translated "Mountain of Spring." Its association with "inverno" or any derivative of the winter season is obscure, but no one who has spent some days of early spring in the beech woods which clothe the mountain to its summit, can doubt the truth of its spring title. It seems the very incarnation of the season in a barren place. Padre Saturnino,\* the present guardian of the convent, rejects this etymology as too fanciful, and prefers to derive Verna from Herna, which in the Italian and Marsian tongues signified rocks. He notes that Ernici, Ernia, Vernia, and Ierna are frequently applied to mountainous places, and quotes Virgil: "Hernica saxa colunt," and the comment of Servius: "Sabinorum lingua saxa hernæ vocantur. Quidam dux Magnus Sabinus de suis locis elicit, et habitare secum fecit saxosis in montibus. Unde dicta sunt Hernica loco et populi Hernici." The relation between H, V and the Æolic digamma F, is sufficient to establish the suggested etymology.

\* *Guida Illustrata della Verna*. Prato, 1902.

first God and then Messer Orlando, he spoke thus to him : ‘ Messer Orlando, when you have returned to your house I will send to you some of my companions, and you will show them this mountain ; and if it seem to them apt for prayer and penitence, I will accept your gracious offer on the spot.’ And when he had said this S. Francis departed, and when he had brought his journey to an end he returned to S. Maria degli Angeli ; and likewise Messer Orlando, when the festivities of that company were over, returned to his castle, which was called Chiusi, only a mile distant from La Verna.”

There is a subtle kinship between the abrupt rocky heights of this district of Romagna and the wood-crowned peak of the Casentino. In several instances the impression of resemblance is strong, though almost too elusive for analysis : the formation of the heights, and above all the sweeping effects of mountain horizon from their summits, is sufficiently similar to relate them, and it may well be that Orlando, listening to Francis’ frank delight in the soaring, natural strongholds among which he had just passed, was reminded of the still more exalted and more lovely solitude which lay within his gift, and rejoiced in the thought of securing the near presence of a man whom report had already endeared to him, and to whom contact had bound him in an intuitive act of homage.

Francis was always a prince among men, now in his renunciation as earlier in his assertion of leadership ; high and low fell under the spell of his personality, and he received with a gracious dignity which was truly kingly the service and affection so naturally and spontaneously offered. In his boyish dreams of glory it was himself in identification with an idea, not in the narrow limits of a personality, that he exalted ; and he who harbours no dream of self, never fears to receive the worship which springs to enthrone beauty wherever sight is quickened to perceive it. Thus we never read that Francis shrank from proffered allegiance, or from material gifts, when the giver had so far entered into his mystic reading of himself in relation to his mission, as to give through rather than to him. We cannot too much applaud the tact and insight of Orlando, who, after this single meeting, offered his mountain not to the individual Francis, but impersonally to "whoever should wish to do penance," and as if for his own soul's health rather than for the gratification of his newly made friend. So offered, Francis had no scruples. He who had left the cell at Sarteano, which he had chanced to hear designated as his, accepts the gift of the mountain with the unhesitating joy of a child. There is something which kindles the imagination in this gift of a mountain, and something in the natural

and unsurprised spontaneity of Francis' acceptance, which recalls the days of his royal visions. We lament the silence of history concerning the courtly Orlando, who was so wise and so cunning a dispenser of his bounties.

Then follows in the *Fioretti*, the mission of two brothers to La Verna under escort of Orlando, who was overwhelmed with joy at their coming. "And he, wishing to show them the mountain of La Verna, sent with them accordingly at least fifty armed men to defend them against wild beasts: and thus accompanied, these brothers ascended the mountain and searched diligently; and at last they came to a part of the mountain well suited to devout contemplation; and in this part there was a level space; and they chose that place for their own habitation and for Francis; and with the help of the armed men who were with them, they together made a sort of rude cell of the branches of trees, and so they accepted in God's name, and took possession of the mountain of La Verna and the place of the brothers in that mountain; and they departed and returned to S. Francis."

Very little time was allowed to elapse between the return of the Brothers with their enthusiastic account, and Francis' own departure. He was filled with joy at the success of their mission, and longed to enter on his new possession. The plan was speedily

formed of consecrating the mountain by celebrating there the fast of S. Michael, which was just about to begin. So he set out with three companions, Angelo Tancredi, Masseo, and Leo, deputing to Masseo the post of guardian and general director on the journey. In this case the office of administrator was a nominal one : the little company were to follow no predetermined rule, nor to take thought for food, drink or shelter, that their mind might be free from all material anxieties, trusting to God and the courtesy of their fellow-men to supply their needs. And in those parts of Italy where the foreigner has not yet imposed his standard and circulated his coin, such confidence is rarely misplaced. The appearance of a dwelling, however humble, is a sure guarantee of shelter and refreshment, proffered with eager and ungrudging hospitality. But the road to La Verna was long, and in many parts altogether uninhabited ; on the second night, the *Fioretti* records that partly from fatigue, partly on account of the bad weather, the Brothers could not reach a hermitage nor any town or village, but were obliged to shelter for the night in a deserted church, no doubt without the meal which they were to beg "at the hour of sheltering." But Francis' weariness could not find rest in sleep : his devotions are related by the *Fioretti* in merely conventional terms ; we know only that, after a night of wakeful

agitation, he was too worn to face the long day's march on foot, and did not oppose his companions' decision to obtain an ass for him. They asked the loan of it from a poor labourer, who, hearing mention of brother Francis, and noticing perhaps the rude dress of the Brothers, asked them if they were followers of that brother of Assisi of whom so much good was told. Hearing that it was the same Francis for whom they were asking the ass, he made ready his beast and went with the Brothers. Then follows the episode eminently characteristic of Francis, and permanently characteristic also of the Italian peasant, who as host or guide deems he holds a brief for all questioning, and for a sage admixture of advice. The peasant defined the responsibilities of a saintly reputation with an acuteness which delighted Francis. "And when they had gone a little way, the peasant said to Francis: 'Say, are you brother Francis of Assisi?' S. Francis replied that he was. 'Try then,' said the peasant, 'to be as good as all men hold you to be, for many have great faith in you; and so I exhort you that there be nothing found in you but what men hope to find.' S. Francis, hearing these words, did not disdain to be admonished by a peasant, and did not say within himself: 'What beast is this who gives me advice?' as many proud folk who wear the cowl would say now; but he at once threw himself from



off his ass and knelt before him and kissed his feet, and thanked him right humbly for having deigned thus lovingly to admonish him."

But Francis was soon called on to prove the practical efficacy as well as the sincerity of saintship. The little company had accomplished only half of the long ascent which on all sides leads from the plain to the great tableland beneath La Verna, when the peasant's energies gave out, and he began loudly to call on Francis to supply his parching thirst. Giotto has immortalised the discovery of the spring in one of the most simple and moving of his frescoes.<sup>1</sup> His landscape is, of course, conventional, but it nevertheless may be said fairly to symbolise the bare inhospitable rock of the traditional site midway between Rassina and La Verna. The stony mountain slopes are sparsely wooded in parts, but large stretches of the plateau are barren and apparently incapable of cultivation, and the sun beats down mercilessly through the long summer days on the wastes of loose shale, which in the heat of noon burns the sight almost torturingly.

Vasari's description of La Verna as a savage desert, though doubtless based on hearsay, and certainly most inapplicable to the wooded peak, which alone is truly La Verna, not ineptly expresses the sense of naked isolation which creeps

<sup>1</sup> In the Upper Church of S. Francesco at Assisi.



over one at midday up the stony path from Rassina.

Seeing that Orlando did not send to welcome Francis till the day following his arrival, we are at liberty to suppose that the travellers halted after the discovery of the spring, and did not finish their journey till the cooler airs had begun to creep round them. From this point La Verna would be ever before them, towering above the surrounding heights, but still unrevealed in beauty ; it is seen only as a great dark-crested rock dominating the solitudes, but it casts its influence far down to meet the wanderer who towards sunset makes it his bourne.

Up the steep road<sup>1</sup> he climbs, still stepping into daylight, while the evening shadows are blurring the outline of the lesser hills. Looking back, he sees peak after peak rising behind as he mounts into the upper air, quickening visions of undreamed expanse and unvoiced solitudes. We can picture the joy with which Francis passed for the first time from the dusty, toilsome road into the marvellous calm of his wooded solitude. A

<sup>1</sup> The road from Bibbiena, winding up rocky and wooded slopes from a deep river valley, is incomparably more beautiful than the road or track from Rassina, which, coming from Arezzo, was the way generally taken by Francis, the former road being of much later formation. Bibbiena, 12 kilometres distant, is the nearest point on the railway to La Verna.

magic circle seems drawn round the base of the great rock. The soil is no longer barren, but covered with green, soft turf. Flowers grow in abundance among the meadow grass, watered by gently trickling freshets, and the glorious woods creep down to shelter them. The convent buildings peer over the precipitous ramparts of La Verna, and above them the solemn woods are preserved in all their beauty, guarded as a sacred thing from the ravages of the profane woodman whose hand is too evident in all the country-side. Convents have everywhere rendered this inestimable protective service to the trees of Italy. Where they are found there is sanctuary for trees and birds. It is impossible to describe the sense of uniqueness inspired by this incomparable wooded solitude. The trees have gained a sacramental majesty from the transcendent solemnity of their position. They do not confine, they humble yet exalt the spirit. They are no dark sun-reft anchorites; the sun's morning and evening beams penetrate their depths. At his rising, he streams through the beeches round the mountain's base, bathing the sight in translucent green. And at sunset the upper heights are illumined. The lower woods lie then in shadow, but the arrowy pine-trunks shine in strange mottled clothing of snowy lichen and sunlit moss.

It is at this hour that we may imagine Francis first drawing near to his mountain, the crown and glory of the Franciscan heritage. He received a welcome which was calculated to make him enter it with joy, as an incorporated member of the forest brotherhood. "And drawing near to the foot of the rock of La Verna itself, it pleased S. Francis to halt awhile under an oak which was above the path, and is there to this day; resting under it, S. Francis began to take note of the situation of the place and of the country round; and as he stood thus considering, lo, there came a great multitude of birds from various parts, who by singing and flapping of wings showed the utmost joy and gladness; and they wheeled round S. Francis in such a way that some perched on his head, some on his shoulders, and some on his arms, some on his lap, and some round his feet. At sight of this, the companions and the peasant were greatly amazed; and S. Francis with great joy of heart, spoke thus: 'I believe, dearest brothers, that it is pleasing to our Lord Jesus Christ that we should dwell in this solitary mountain, since our sisters and brothers the birds show such joy at our coming.' And when he had said these words, they rose and went on; and at last they came to the place which his companions had first chosen."

A little chapel, known as the Chapel of the Birds, marks the spot of this happy welcoming, at the foot of the last ascent to the convent, in an angle of the way.

News was at once taken to Orlando of Francis' arrival, and next morning he hastened to visit him with provisions for his entertainment. Francis was already in prayer, but not yet withdrawn from the company of the Brothers, and he received his new friend with a joy which must have amply repaid him for his gift, for Francis' joy was infectious, and his delight in the mountain was undisguised. Their mutual salutations were followed by intimate talk, and then Francis proffered his request for a rude cell at a stone's throw from the shelter of the Brothers, in which he might remain alone to pray. The place he chose was below the level of the Brothers' oratory, sheltered from their observation by a great mass of rock, and overshadowed by a magnificent beech; from it he would look out over the wide expanse of mountains to the south-west. By the time Orlando's company had put together a humble cell, evening was drawing on, and Francis, after a short address, dismissed them with his blessing. Then Orlando called the Saint and his companions aside, and exhorted them to send to his castle to supply all their needs, reminding them that bodily neces-



VIEW FROM THE CHAPEL OF THE BIRDS

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sity might well distract them from spiritual things, and assuring them that he should take it ill if they hesitated to avail themselves of his service. When he had gone, Francis set himself to counteract the possible effect of too great lavishness. "And amongst other things, he impressed upon them above all the observance of holy poverty, saying: 'Do not pay too much heed to the charitable offer of Messer Orlando, lest in anything you offend our Lady and Madonna holy Poverty. Know for certain that the more we shun poverty, the more shall we be shunned by the world and shall suffer need; but if we embrace holy poverty very closely, the world will come after us and feed us bountifully. God has called us in this holy religion for the salvation of the world, and has made this pact between us and the world: that we should set a good example to the world, and that the world should provide for us in our need. Let us then persevere in holy poverty, for it is the way of perfection and the pledge of eternal riches.'"

We have noticed that the *Fioretti* combines all incidents in the narrative of a single visit. It is plain that hitherto, and with the probable exception of the devotions outside the ruined church, our authority has been treating of the first visit to La Verna; but from this point, in the absence of documentary evidence concerning the intermediate

visits, we are no longer able to distinguish the chronology of the incidents related, and are obliged to accept the lead of the *Fioretti* in arranging all events in a consecutive sketch of Francis' last visit, culminating in the impression of the Stigmata. One incident only, related in the *Speculum Perfectionis*,<sup>1</sup> may be included here before we pass to the last experiences of Francis on La Verna; it plainly belongs to a time of less complete isolation from the Brothers than he observed during his farewell visit.

"One day, while he was keeping Lent in the mountain of La Verna, his companion at meal time laid the fire in the cell where he was accustomed to eat, and when the fire was kindled he went for S. Francis to another cell where he was praying, carrying with him a missal that he might read him the gospel for the day; for he always wished to hear the gospel which was read that day at mass before he ate, when he could not hear mass.

"And by the time he had come to the cell where the fire was kindled for cooking, the flames had mounted even to the roof of the cell and had set it on fire; his companion did what he could to extinguish the fire, but he could not do it alone. For blessed Francis would not help him, but took up a skin with which he was wont to cover him-

<sup>1</sup> *Spec. Perf.*, 117.



self by night, and went off by himself into the wood.

“Now when the brothers who were encamped a long way from that cell saw that the cell was burning, they came running from their place and put out the fire. Afterwards S. Francis came back for the meal, and after the meal he said to his companion: ‘I will never have this skin over me again, for it was because of my avarice that I did not want brother Fire to burn it.’”

Brother Leo, with true artistic instinct, builds up his picture of reserves and confidences. He is as eloquent in what he withholds as in what he communicates. We get a curiously fascinating picture of the aloofness of Francis, utterly unconscious for the moment of any responsibility towards his human brother, or of any anxiety for the fabric which brother Fire was pleased to devour. Leo understood his friend too well to press him for help in quelling his favourite element: there is no request or refusal recorded, but his simple statement, “*Beatus vero Franciscus noluit juvare ipsum,*” is eloquent of past experience.

In the farewell visit to La Verna, Leo was not only the most intimate, but the sole companion of Francis, who from the beginning regarded this time as a final and almost sacramental consecration of his whole being in anticipation of approaching death.

Special provision was made by him against any intrusion from the outside world. "‘Brother Leo, when it seems good to him, shall bring me a little bread and a little water ; and on no account whatever are you to let any come to me that are of the world,<sup>1</sup> but do you answer them for me.’ And when he had said these words, he gave them his blessing and went away to the beech-tree cell, and his companions remained in their place, firmly resolved to obey the commands of S. Francis." He was only too well accustomed to interruptions from the crowd of those who are always seeking a sign ; and though at La Verna he was sufficiently remote to secure him from vulgar intrusion, he no doubt anticipated some distraction from the near neighbourhood of Orlando.

This was, as it were, the first act of Francis’ last drama on the mountain. He was still on the outskirts of his crowning experience, but we see that it already determined the form of his visions. One day, standing by his cell in contemplation of the great fissures and isolated rocky masses which are a striking feature of the mountain in the neighbourhood of the beech-tree cell, it seemed to Francis that they had certainly been cleft from the mountain in the hour of Christ’s Passion. And it is clear from the awe and mystery with which he invested

<sup>1</sup> "Secolari" as opposed to "religiosi."

this conviction, that the identification of his own body with that of Christ in his sufferings was becoming daily more defined. But the absorption of Francis in contemplation of the divine grace did not weaken his human sympathies ; his insight into the thoughts and desires of the Brothers was quickened with the increasing intensity of his spiritual rapture.

He gave touching proof of his understanding when Leo, conscious of his friend's growing infirmity, was overcome during the lonely vigil by the sense of approaching desolation and loneliness, and began to crave some tangible proof of Francis' affection. Francis was swift to guess the half-defined longings of his companion, and calling him one day, bade him bring pen and ink and wrote for him the formula of blessing, still preserved at Assisi :—

“Benedicat tibi Dominus et custodiat te ;  
Ostendat faciem suam tibi et misereatur tui :  
Convertat vultum suum ad te et det tibi pacem.”

And at the foot of the parchment he set a cross, in the form of the Greek TAU, adding the more intimate and personal blessing : “Dominus benedicat f. Leo te.” This he gave to Leo, saying: “Dearest brother, take this paper, and keep it diligently till your death. May God bless you and guard you against all temptations. And be not dismayed if

temptations come to you, for I deem you then most a friend and servant of God, and the more you are assailed by temptations the more I love you. I tell you truly that no man ought to consider himself a perfect friend of God, till he has passed through many temptations and tribulations." And Leo's weight of depression was lifted from him, and his "temptation" suddenly departed from him.

Francis himself was not without doubts and misgivings for the family committed to him. Dissensions and signs of insurgency were already beginning to appear among the Brothers, and the bitterness was increased for Francis by his sense of growing inability to continue his personal control, the one sure corrective to their discontent.

We hear of at least one anxious questioning concerning the future of the Order, during this fast on the mountain, set at rest by an angelic apparition; it was but one of many such inward wrestlings, which during these last years must have tormented Francis.

But now the second and most strenuous act of the drama was to open. As the festival of the Assumption of the Virgin drew near, Francis began to long for a still more remote place of meditation. It is not unlikely that despite his precautions, the devout curiosity of the Brothers encroached from

time to time upon his solitude, and it is clear from the instructions given to Leo, in his choice of a new place, that Francis was particularly anxious to prevent his spiritual colloquies from being overheard. Stationing Leo at the door of the common oratory to test his success, Francis proposed to move to a point from which his voice would not carry to the shelter of the Brothers. The first choice proved still too near, but at last they discovered a place which, from its almost perilous isolation, seemed at least to promise security from intrusion. "And as they were seeking, they discovered on the side of the mountain, facing south, a secret and most fitting place for his devotions ; but it was impossible to reach it on account of a horrible and fearful cleft in the rock of great extent, across which, with great pains, they laid a plank in the manner of a bridge and crossed over." The actual spot cannot now be distinguished. It was clearly in the neighbourhood of the perpendicular southern wall of rock known as the Precipizio, which from the meadows below appears to bear the main block of convent buildings ; but the original character of the mountain in this part has been considerably modified by passages and chapels, forming a kind of setting or outer temple to the precincts which for the Franciscan family were the shrine of their most sacred mysteries. Francis' continued adherence

to this portion of the mountain is significant of the effect produced on his mind by his vision concerning its formation. He was no doubt attracted by the romantic and startling irregularity of its appearance, as also by its inaccessibility, but far more by its imagined connexion with the Passion of Christ. The spot now chosen by him for his meditations immediately overlooked a strangely rent and jagged embrasure in the mountain side, in the midst of which rises in apparent disconnexion from the surrounding rock, the remarkable fragment known as Sasso Spicco, attached to the mountain only by a disproportionately narrow base, imperceptible from above. A permanent causeway of solid masonry now bridges the chasm across which Francis had to set his plank, and it is difficult even imaginatively to isolate his rocky promontory. The curious indentations visible in the face of the precipice below his cell were impressed on it, in the imagination of his followers, by the hands and face of Francis, whom the solid rock received into itself from the assaults of the devil.

More attractive than the ministrations of brother Rock is the relationship between Francis and the falcon, who nested near to his cell, and took upon itself the office of daily alarum, refusing to leave its flapping and its song till it had made sure Francis was thoroughly roused to say matins : but

the legend, with characteristic Franciscan tenderness, endows the bird with sympathy which exalts its office above the mere exercise of clockwork precision. "And if S. Francis was more tired at one time than another, or more feeble or infirm, this falcon, like a discreet and compassionate person, would begin to sing later than usual. And so S. Francis took great pleasure in this clock; for the great watchfulness of the falcon drove from him all idleness and incited him to prayer; and beside this, sometimes by day it would sit tamely with him."

The weariness caused by his increased austerities found rest and refreshment also in heavenly music. Francis, meditating on the joy of the blessed, was filled with intense longing to share in their minstrelsy. "And as he stood wrapt in this thought, an angel appeared to him with great splendour, bearing a viol in his left hand and the bow in his right; and while S. Francis stood full of amazement at the sight of this angel, he drew the bow once across the viol; and suddenly was heard such tender melody, that the soul of Francis was filled with sweetness and deprived of every bodily feeling; so that, as he afterwards told his companions, he believed that if the angel had drawn the bow again across the strings, his soul would have fled from his body for the intoler-



able sweetness of it." Francis' heavenly visitors make music on the instrument he had most loved to imitate, when he went through the woods near Assisi, drawing a rude stick across his crooked arm, and singing to the imaginary accompaniment.

In entering upon this last period of contemplation, Francis had repeated with increased stringency his instructions against any kind of disturbance. Even Leo was no longer free to visit his master with food at such times as it might seem good to himself. He was to come once a day only, and once in the night at the hour of matins, and he was to come in silence. At the head of the bridge he should call: "Lord, open thou my lips," and if Francis replied, he was to cross over and say matins with him; if not, to depart at once. Except for their mutual devotions, the visits were to be made in silence.

One night, towards the festival of the Holy Cross, Leo went as usual to the bridge and waited for Francis' answer to his watchword; but no answer came. Overcome by the sickening sense of exclusion, which must have been growing during his enforced aloofness, and craving to support his friend in the weakness which he must have seen to be daily gaining ground—perhaps even half dreading lest a sudden transport should have snapped the frail thread which bound his soul and body—Leo



disobeyed Francis' order, and crossing the bridge entered his cell very quietly. It was empty. And Leo by the light of the moon went up into the woods and crept softly about, looking for Francis among the deep shadowy hollows of the rocks which fringe the western edge of the mountain. "And at last he heard the voice of Francis : and drawing near, he saw him on his knees in prayer, with face and hands raised to heaven : and in fervour of spirit he spoke thus : 'Who art thou, my sweetest God ? What am I, thy most vile worm and useless servant ?' And he continued to repeat ever these same words, and said no other thing."

We do not know what followed. Leo himself keeps silence on all these moments of intimate communion on the mountain ; in his biography he never draws the veil from the reserves of this time. In a single paragraph, appended to the blessing of Francis, he records in the simplest terms the impression of the Stigmata ; we do not know how far he was capable of entering—except in the sympathy of a love which was content silently to accept where it could not understand—into the mystic communion of Francis with the universal spirit and its natural manifestations ; we can only gather from the account of the *Fioretti*, that an extraordinary radiance seemed to surround Francis in

this hour ; what he himself called " a light of contemplation " ; and enfolded in this light, his vision penetrated into the depths of God's infinite goodness and wisdom and power, though still across the brightness of his vision fell the shadow of his own insufficiency.

We have few recorded visions of Francis on his mountain, but many passing mentions of recurrent ecstasy : and it would be strange if, amid all his wrestlings, great peace and joy had not come to him there. Night and day are nowhere more sweetly wedded ; it is in the hour when they join hands that the deepest and most penetrating glories are revealed. Night after night Francis must have climbed from his post on the lower rock into the great solemn woods, in the hour when the beech leaves shine in transparent radiance among the gloom, and the scent of flowers is most subtly drawn from their mossy bed.

Night after night he must have out-lingered the fervent afterglow, while twilight drew her dusky veil of dewy mist across the line of purple mountains, and have watched the moon changing from gold to silvery wanness, as she rose above the pine woods, or unconscious of her motions, have welcomed her sudden radiance on his path as a divine response ; and heedless of the creeping damps, have knelt in prayer till matin twilight, as on

this night when Leo came upon him in the woods, and withdrew to watch his intercession from afar.

When the vision seemed to have departed, Leo began to return to his cell, rejoicing in the joy which he felt had been granted to Francis. "And as he was going securely on his way, S. Francis, who had heard the rustling of his feet upon the leaves, commanded him to wait for him and not to go on. Then brother Leo obediently stood still and awaited him in great fear, so that, as he afterwards told his companions, he would have rather that the earth should open on the spot and swallow him up than wait for S. Francis, who he thought would be displeased with him; for he always took great heed not to offend his fatherhood, lest, for any fault of his, S. Francis should deprive him of his company. And when S. Francis had come up with him, he asked him: 'Who art thou?' And brother Leo, all trembling, replied: 'I am brother Leo, my father.' And S. Francis said to him: 'Why didst thou come hither, my brother lamb? Did I not tell thee not to come watching me? Tell me, by holy obedience, if thou didst see or hear aught?' Brother Leo replied: 'Father, I heard thee speak and say several times: Who art thou, oh my sweetest God? What am I, thy most vile worm and useless servant?' And then Leo, falling on

his knees before S. Francis, confessed disobedience to his command, and asked his pardon with many tears. And afterwards he prayed him devoutly to explain to him the words he had heard, and to tell him those which he had not heard." Francis, with surpassing tenderness, granted his request, and shared the vision with his companion, piercing with swift intuition through the apparent neglect of his wishes to the heartsick loneliness which had prompted it. No reproof could so completely have restored the old loyalty of their relationship as this most touching sign of his confidence. Francis may even have felt that he had, in some measure, neglected his faithful companion, and have awoke with a sense almost of contrition to a realisation of his loneliness, remembering the earlier instance of his depression. So, with a crowning act of loving consideration, he let Leo continue his ministrations beyond his wont of late, bidding him bring, before his final dismissal, the book of the Gospels, that God's pleasure concerning himself might be made known by his favourite method of opening the book at random, after prayer for divine guidance. The same childish test had, in the beginning of the Order, determined the formula of the rule. It is not strange that the book opened at the subject of his constant meditation—the Passion of Christ. "For which thing it

was given him to understand that as he had followed Christ in the acts of his life, so he must follow him and be made like to him in his afflictions, and sorrows, and in his sufferings before he passed from this life." This anticipatory formulating of an event which was yet scarcely matter of speculation, need not make us dismiss the *Fioretti* as of no historical value. Despite the exuberance of the narrative, it reveals such subtle and sympathetic divination of the state of Francis' mind at this time, that these "Considerations of the holy Stigmata" are our surest guide to understanding him. The intermixture of subsequent reflexion, with the event they relate, discounts their value as a consecutive historic document, but not as an interpretation of a spiritual experience.

Francis' meditations increased in joy and an intimate realisation of God's presence. "From this point onwards he began to taste and to feel more abundantly the sweetness of divine contemplation and of divine visitations."

At last came the day of the Holy Cross, the day in which all his meditations were centred. And in the early hours before the dawn, Francis threw himself in prayer before the door of his cell, facing towards the east, and he prayed after this manner: "O my Lord Jesus Christ, two

graces I pray of Thee before I die : the first, that in my life I may feel in my soul and in my body, so far as is possible, that pain which Thou, sweet Lord, didst bear in the hour of Thy bitterest suffering ; the second is that I may feel in my heart, so far as is possible, that exceeding love by which Thou, dear Son of God, wast kindled to bear willingly so great suffering for us sinners."

This is the first recorded prayer in which Francis consciously frames the desire, that had grown with him and become a part of his being, to bear in his body "the marks of the Lord Jesus" ; and now for the first time he received the assurance of its fulfilment. "And the fervour of his devotion grew so greatly within him that he was wholly transformed into Jesus through love and compassion."

It is only with great reverence that we may venture any comment on this scene of Francis' life : to him it was undoubtedly its crown—a final pledge of union with the divine teacher to whose law his life was entirely devoted in spirit and in letter. On one side we may feel that it was the weakness of Francis, not his strength, which in its consummation on La Verna has been regarded by his followers as the convincing and incontestable proof of his sanctity ; for the impression of the Stigmata was an experience that could only have

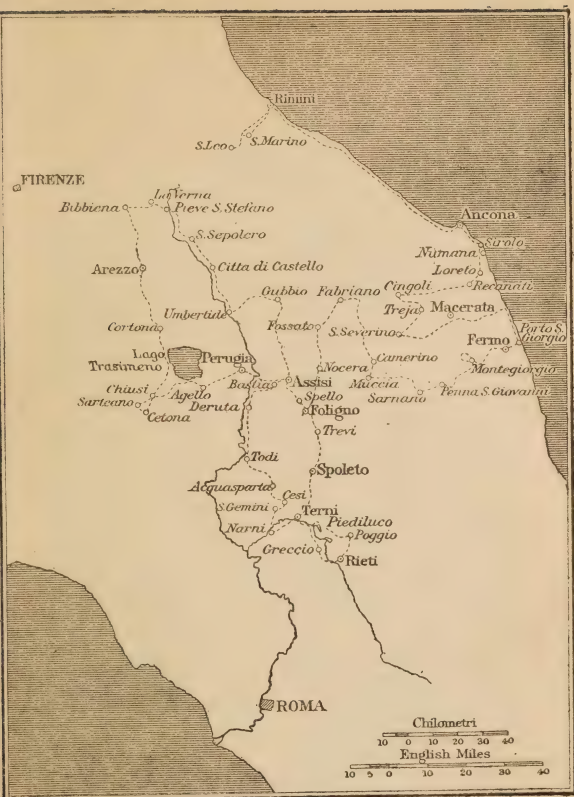
become possible after a long period of unceasing contemplation on the physical fact which it renewed.

But we must remember that Francis' life was not passed in barren contemplation of the Passion of Christ. The image of the crucified, which he bore always in his heart, had two aspects for him—both of which find expression in the prayer just recorded—exceeding pain and exceeding love; and his life was a constant effort to combine these two aspects in himself. Thus the apparition which traditionally impressed the Stigmata on Francis is rightly figured as a winged seraph; it was the body of Christ glorified to which his own was to be conformed: his physical experience was spiritualised and raised from earth to heaven. It is impossible to express more truly this mystic relation than in the words of the *Fioretti*: "He felt exceeding joy in the precious look of Christ, who appeared to him so lovingly and gazed on him so graciously: but, on the other hand, seeing him crucified on the cross, he felt unmeasured grief from compassion. Moreover, he marvelled greatly at so fearful and unaccustomed a vision, knowing well that the infirmity of suffering is not consistent with the immortality of the seraphic spirit. And as he stood thus in wonder, it was revealed by him who appeared to him that by divine providence this vision had been shown

to him in such a form ; in order that he might understand that not by martyrdom of the body, but by the illumination of his mind, he must be wholly transformed into the express image of Christ crucified as he had thus marvellously appeared to him."

And the light which shone into Francis' soul, assuring him forever of his participation in the love as in the suffering of Christ, and filling his mind with a strength and joy greater than his growing physical pains, seemed to surround La Verna, and illumine all the mountains and valleys ; the splendours of the dawn were endowed on that morning with a peculiar radiance, and when the tale was told afterwards to the shepherds, who had been watching on the country-side, they bore witness to the glory transcendent with which day broke upon the mountain.





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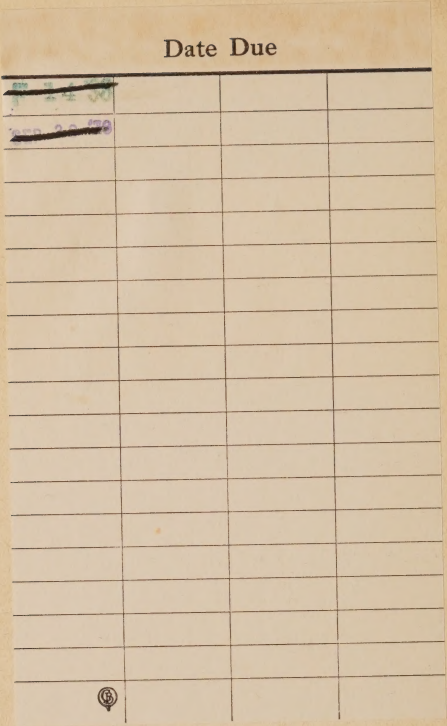
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